

# Peculiarities of Love

by Valor Grim

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Summary: Vikings are not very patient. And when Stoic decides that Hiccup needs a little help in the love department, he takes matters into his own hands. Now Hiccup and Astrid are thrown into a whole other world they are woefully unprepared for... the world of marriage. Rated T for now, but may be subject to change later. Hiccupstrid slow burn.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*\*Raises from the dead\* That's right folks, I'm back. I have been gone from fanfiction for a LONG while. However, I figured that I would give it another shot and see what happens. I've been reading a lot on this particular couple and I have to say, some of the authors here have captured my heart and my mind when it comes to Hiccup and Astrid. I don't plan for this particular story to last over 15 to 20 chapters, so it won't really be as epic as some other amazing authors here. I just hope I can do this particular couple right and tell a good story. Enjoy! I hope.\*\*

If there is one thing you should know about Vikings, it's that they aren't a very patient people. This is kind of odd when you consider all the farming and fishing that goes on. Unfortunately, patience was probably the most lost on the chief of the tribe, Stoic the Vast. Whether it is spoiling for a good fight, preparing for the winter, or starting his day, he liked to begin early. And that trait showed in his most recent decision.

"You WHAT!?" Hiccup gasped as he jumped three feet in the air, stumbling over his wooden chair at the table.

"I told you, son. I spoke to the Hoffersons today and arranged a marriage contract between you and Astrid. I'm not blind, son. I see how you and the girl act around each other." Stoic smirked, thinking that he needed a pat on the back for picking up on the relationship

he just knew his son was in. And to think, all it took was a kiss in front of him to figure it out. Heck, he was probably the only Viking that thought they were in a relationship; it was so quick of a kiss. Yep, he definitely deserved a pat on his back for his chief like observation skills.

"Why would you DO that?" Hiccup started to panic and hyperventilate at the same time. Toothless, who had been chowing down on some fish behind the two men, perked up to see his rider chocking on air. He shifted over slightly and moved closer to his friend, worry evident in his eyes.

"What? I was married around your age. And I think Astrid would make a great match. You two are already seeing each other, which is dangerous I might add, so I thought I'd do the safe thing and marry you two off before anything bad happened." Stoic, smug look and all, sat back in his chair with a grin. He knew Hiccup didn't know the law about dating. He figured now would be a perfect time to let him know.

Hiccup had calmed down somewhat at his father's explanation. And something kept nagging him in his head after he listened to him. "Dangerous? How is dating Astrid dangerous? I mean, aside from the punching and yelling andâ€¦ you know you might be right. But that's aside from the point! We're not dating! What gave you the idea that we were?" Hiccup started to get a tad angry at his overconfident father.

"Oh, you may have fooled the rest of the island, but nothing happens on this island without me knowing about it. Now, Hiccup, as future chief, you need to know all the laws of this tribe. And there has been a lot of them that you need to learn. So you might want to start with this one. In our tribe, dating is fine to do, however, if the girl is found to have lost her purity before her wedding, the father of the girl has the right to behead the boy that took her purity from her. So you see son, I'm just protecting you. So I went and told Angnir that we should not risk you two dating very long. He likes you, son, and he said that he would regret beheading you if something happened." Stoic stretched a little as he leaned back a bit. His back was starting to ache, that meant that the cold was on the way. He thought about the storage for the village food for a second, then looked back at Hiccup. His son's mouth was open and all the color was drained from his face. "Are you alright, son?"

"Ahâ€¦uhhâ€¦ I-I had no idea that law was there. But still! I'd never do that to her! I don't have enough courage to do that to her! How could you think that?" Hiccup was starting to feel overwhelmed. He wasn't panicking anymore, just sort of numbed instead. All this was hitting the poor boy too fast and he hadn't caught up with his feelings yet. His mind too busy trying to process the fact that him and Astrid were engaged. And his eventual death at her hands when she found out.

"You don't have the courage to love a woman, but you have the courage to face that beast of a dragon without fear? I find that hard to believe. Well, either way, what is done is done. The contract has been drawn up and finalized. It will all be alright. The wedding won't happen until the storms have passed, and if my back is telling me the truth, they will be here for a while." Stoic got up from his seat, dumped the remainder of his food in Toothless' pile of fish and

then started to walk to his bedroom. "Best get some sleep, son. You'll have a long day tomorrow." And with that, the big chief was out of sight.

"Oh, the gods hate me." Hiccup slumped into his chair and stared at his half eaten mutton. If he was honest with himself, this could have been worse. Astrid and her family could have been over or his dad could have told him in the great hall or Snotlout could have been here to overhear it. The possibilities of this being worse were still there, but the impending anger that would inevitably come from Astrid just about made up for all of it. He looked over at Toothless, who after making sure that Hiccup was indeed capable of breathing, went back to eating his fish. "Well, bud, at least you'll be here." Hiccup grabbed his salmon and dumped it next to Toothless. He then sat down and waited for his best friend to finish.

After a few minutes, the fish were gone and Toothless was curled around his friend, having his chin scratched. Hiccup let his thoughts swirl around in his head for a bit, thoughtlessly scratching Toothless when it came to him. Yeah, sure, he'd thought about marrying Astrid. He had for a long time, but not so soon. Never in his imagination had he thought that he'd marry her after their second kiss. Heck, he didn't even know if they were dating. Sure, she kissed him twice and he knew that there was something there between them, but he didn't really know if it was considered dating or not. They never really broached the subject. But now, he has to think about marrying her. And probably without her consent.

No. He would not marry her if she didn't agree to it. He knew that if he did, it would not only kill any feelings that she might have for him, but also kill their friendship as well. Above all else, he knew how to cherish a hard earned friendship. Toothless, who was purring half asleep and in total bliss, was a case in point. He knew he didn't have a say in the matter. And to be fair, he didn't really mind that it would be Astrid he was marrying, compared to another girl that his father could have picked out for him. However, his feelings came secondary to Astrid's. Hiccup grit his teeth and slowly stood, waking Toothless up. He steeled his resolve and trudged up to his room. Regardless of what his father and chief had done. He would make things right. After all, him and tradition never really got alongâ€¦!

\*\*I haven't really been the best in the world when it comes to updating and I get caught up in real life a lot, but reviews really go a long way to helping me along. I'm not one of the authors that demand reviews before I release stories, but I will say that the more reviews I get and opinions that I read, the better I feel about writing and usually the faster I update. That being said, please tell me how I'm doing and/or what you like or dislike about this so far. I would appreciate no flames, but if you feel that you must, it's your opinion. I just ask that you please keep it clean. Thanks for reading the first chapter! I hope that I'll have the next one up soon!\*\*

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*Alright, I finally got to a computer to post! It was a tad later than I wanted it to be, but I finally got this thing posted. Now, let me clarify a couple things. First off, I know that some of the

concepts that I will introduce are quite modern, but I would like to blend them in with old traditional ways that I have read about in Viking society. Sort of like Hiccup, a little forward thinking with some tradition thrown in and you get one heck of a Viking. For example, dating wasn't really something that happened much back in those days (or so I've read) so although my story has it, it really isn't traditional. However, marriage contracts and the like were used. I've done a little research, but if any of you feel that you know something that might help, please do not hesitate to tell me. I read each and every one of my reviews for this story and I like what they are saying so far! So without further ado, please enjoy the next installment of POLA€|\*\*

Hiccup woke up the next morning in a cold sweat. His eyes searched to and fro until he visibly relaxed. Memories of Astrid's father haunted his dreams. The 6' 7" giant and blonde haired berserker with blood shot blue eyes wielding and overly large battle axe, chasing him around with wild abandon, foaming at the mouth, flooded his early morning thoughts. Hiccup reached up and felt his neck with his hand and gulped.

Toothless shifted a little then decided it was time to get up. He wearily made his way over to his slightly traumatized rider and burped in his face. Either to rouse him from his thoughts or just to be mischievous, no one will ever know. "Loki's Golden Horns! That's nasty!" Hiccup fell off the bed, holding his nose and trying his best not to gag. Toothless laughed at his buddy and left to find his breakfast.

Hiccup picked himself up and got ready. He had to talk to Astrid today. He had made up his mind last night. He had to speak with her and let her know that he would make sure that she wasn't forced into anything. Yeah, if he kept telling himself that, he would eventually have the guts to do itA€|yeah.

Foregoing breakfast, he stumbled downstairs and left the house without looking back. He'd like to say it was because he was that determined, but in truth, it was because quite a crowd had gathered outside near Astrid's house. It stole all of his attention and he quickly went to investigate. Nearing the commotion, he spotted Fishlegs overlooking whatever was happening. "Hey Fishlegs. What's going on?"

"Oh hey hiccup. I'm not really sure, but there is like +7 violence and +9 yelling coming from Astrid's house." By then, Hiccup could make out the sound of crunching wood and clongs of metal coming from inside.

Then with a loud, "DIDN'T THNK!? When do you EVER think? You never asked me what I wanted!" Astrid's screeching pierced the air followed by a body crashing through the door. Scratch that, her giant father wearing full battle armor and his axe flew out of her house, crashing through a reinforced solid wood door. Astrid's dad, Angnir got up, limping slightly, and turned to run. "Well, what DO you want?" He asked, somewhat subdued.

"I want to BURY MY AXE IN YOUR SKULL!" Now, Hiccup was a great many things. A runt, a sceptic, a screw up, a general Hiccup, but a fool he was not. Quickly, he hid behind Fishlegs and peeked around his sturdy friend's girth. Astrid leapt out of her house and landed mere

feet from her cringing father. Fury engulfed her as she raised her axe high above her, the picture perfect scene of a wild berserker turning on her allies. Unfortunately, (or fortunately for Angnir) a very distinct sound whistled into the enraptured audience. Somewhere in the crowd, someone yelled, "Night Fury! Get down!" Astrid turned her murderous gaze towards the sound and saw Toothless landing right next to Fishlegs. Leveling her best glare at the boy, Astrid started moving towards the dragon. Fishlegs trembled for half a second before he screamed and ran off, leaving a very pale and very frightened Hiccup cringing next to his traitorous dragon. "Thank you for nothing, you useless reptile."

Hiccup gulped in fear and anticipation as the flaxen haired Valkyrie approached. He thought about escaping but quelled that false hope early. She would just catch him and be in an even worse temperament than she was now. He thought that it was ironic that the one girl he liked would be the one killing him. Gathering what wits he could, Hiccup fully stood up and started thinking of ways to placate his approaching death. Deciding on a plan of action he said "A-A-Astrid. Hey Astrid. Uhhâ€¦ Hi Astrid." Not the most eloquent or placating, but that was all his impaired brain could produce. Apparently, fear not only makes Hiccup tremble, but less articulate as well. Astrid's demeanor didn't look amused in the slightest. But she DID throw her axe into the ground between Hiccup's legs.

"Hello, Hiccup. Is there anything in particular on your mind?" Anger seething out of her words and implied violence a promise if he didn't catch the hint. The once thoroughly engrossed crowd had disappeared at her approach earlier.

However, Toothless looked from his best friend to the girl that he liked. Toothless knew how dangerous she could be with her axe and knew that she was angry. So he backed away a little bit to see if Hiccup could calm her down. He sat on his haunches and watched what was about to unfold. "Wa-wa-well, I was going to come talk to you about something this morning." Hiccup chirped awkwardly.

"Oh really? You didn't think to come and tell me BEFORE I was bought like a slave!?" Astrid was steadily huffing in rage.

"I-I-I uhhâ€¦ didn't know anything about it until last night. Dad sorta jumped me with it when we were having supper." Hiccup cringed and expected the usual response from her. When the pain didn't appear, he opened his eyes to see Astrid staring at him in mute confusion.

"Wait, so you didn't even know about it?"

"I was as shocked as you were, Astrid. Minus the violence, but still shocked. I didn't think dad would do that. I was hoping he was going to let me ask you on my own time."

Astrid suddenly stiffened as if struck by Thor himself. "Ask me on your own time? You were going to ask to marry me?" She took a step back, a small one, granted, but a step nonetheless.

Hiccup noticed and hurriedly added. "Well, yeah. Eventually. It wasn't going to be anytime soon. I mean, I had a ton of other things to ask first.. Could we start going out? Could we go out on dates together? Could you lay off the punches a little? Could

you-."

"Hiccup, I get the picture." Astrid interrupted his rambling. She honestly didn't know how she felt with him talking like that. She had been furious with him earlier, which was fine. It was tried and true Viking feelings territory. She wanted to murder this little squirt and her father too for going behind her back like that. But to find out that he had nothing to do with it took all the anger out from underneath her. Then add the fact of how he was acting right now and she honestly had no idea what she was feeling. Her heart felt like her belly when it was full, and that was definitely not Viking feeling territory.

Toothless had finally seen the anger in the blonde vanish and saw that his best friend was a little worried about her. He saw the look of utter bewilderment and desperation flood across Hiccup's face. Now, there were very few times he saw Hiccup look this way and he didn't like it. In fact, both Vikings reeked with fear. Not that one of them would ever admit it, but Toothless could smell it. So Toothless did what any good friend would do. He wanted to get rid of the fear and comfort both the boy and the girl. He walked over to the middle ground between the two then coughed to get their attention. They both looked at him and only had time to gasp as he stood up, opened both his wings and engulfed the two in them, snapping the two Vikings into an impromptu hug that shut out the world around them.

It's amazing what you discover when you can't use one of the most important senses you have. For example, Hiccup found out that no matter how tough and sometimes painful Astrid's fists were, the rest of her was unbelievably soft. He felt sorry that she basically got thrown into a walking mass of elbows and knees that he knew he had to be. At the same time, Hiccup realized the position he was in and felt intense heat rise up his face. "Uhhâ€¦ bud? You can let us out now." Hiccup's voice cracked with how nervous he suddenly felt. He heard a distinctive whine and huff that obviously meant they were staying like this for a while. "Oh, that's just great!"

"What?" This had to be one of the most embarrassing things that Astrid had ever done before. Her cheeks lit up almost to luminosity and she felt like punching something. Of course, closeness of the only boy in Berk that she even had a mild interest in wasn't helping her fury. But she shook her head of those thoughts and focused on whatever Hiccup was saying.

"He's not going to let us out for a while."

"What? Why not?"

"He's going to sleep." Hiccup sighed again.

"You're kidding."

"Nope, I'm afraid we're stuck."

"Let's just wake him up." Astrid went to tense up and elbow the reptile until Hiccup stopped her.

"Good luck waking him up. I've done everything short of beating him with a hammer. I couldn't get him to open his eyes."

"Well, we could pry ourselves out of here." Astrid was getting irritated with Toothless more and more now that she realized the situation that he put them in.

"Uhhâ€¦ Astrid, I wouldn't move aroun-." Astrid's struggling and maneuvering caused Toothless to shift to a more comfortable position, which involved crushing Astrid against Hiccup and rolling over, causing Astrid to lie on top of Hiccup. Hiccup held his breath as even more of his crush came into contact with him. He was so dead, he knew it. There was no walking away from this. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, death by incredibly soft yet extremely violent Astrid Hofferson.

Astrid was thinking along the same lines as Hiccup, but the inability to move her arms, which were forced to either side of his ribs, caused her frustrations to gather in a deep sigh. "Tell anyone about this and you're dead." Hiccup nodded uncomfortably. "So if we are stuck here, in the middle of town I might add, how long until he lets us out?"

"I have no idea. Every time he does this with me, I'm stuck until morning."

"Great. My day couldn't possibly get any better." Astrid stopped and a chill ran down her spine as she realized how much like Hiccup she was sounding.

Meanwhile, Hiccup was gathering his courage to confront Astrid about the real reason he showed up. Finally, after concluding that he couldn't be more dead than he was right now, he cleared his throat. "Astrid, since we're kind of stuck, I wanted to talk to you about this uhhâ€¦ thing."

"It's marriage, Hiccup."

"Yeah, that. Uhh, as I was saying, uhh.."

"I know you didn't have a clue. You must be so excited about it. Well, let me tell you, I don't care how much you were looking forward to how many children I'd give you. I'll kill you before that happens. I'm too young to be married. There is too much that I want to do before I get married. I'm not ready to become someone's housewife and mother. I want to have adventures and take Stormfly to different islands and explore the seas. And getting married would take all that away. I..I.." Astrid was ranting as her fears came forth in a flurry of words.

Hiccup heard how afraid she was. Not that he would ever tell her that, but it gave him the resolve he needed to interrupt her. In possibly the boldest move that would ever mark his life, he hugged Astrid's form to himself and started talking. "Alright. Then we won't get married. You're important to me, Astrid. I don't want to force you into anything. I want you to be happy and if marrying me would make you unhappy, then you won't. I'll talk to dad or something and I'll make sure it doesn't happen. I want to discover new dragons, tame them, fly Toothless with you and everyone else. I came to tell you that today. I just couldn't figure out how to say it. So don't worry Astrid. I'll take care of yo-â€¦it. I'll take care of it."

Astrid was caught completely off guard. She didn't know how to react. When he started talking, she felt like skinning him alive for grabbing her. Then, he had to keep talking and now her heart hurt. Her eyes burned like she had cut an onion or something. The things this boy did to her made her so angry and confused, yet oddly comforting. She still wanted to beat him, but maybe he deserved something else afterwards.

Never being a woman of great patience, Astrid decided to act immediately before Hiccup decided to screw up more. So she drew back her head and brought it down on his quickly in a short, but painful head butt. "OW! Ok, I deserved that bu-." Hiccup was yet again interrupted by Astrid as she lowered her head again, but this time to stifle his moving lips with her own. Well, that was the plan anyway, but it turns out, complete darkness can mess with your aim and she kissed Hiccup on nose instead.

"Thanks for understanding, Hiccup." Hiccup's face fell slack with shock and his eyes drooped in a daze at the area in front of him. Confusion slightly contorted his features, but it was given the least amount of attention. Unfortunately, his reverie was broken as a random idea seemed to hit him from nowhere. Hiccup shook his head looked upward, even though he couldn't see anything. He sighed and realized how stupid he had been in times past when Toothless did this to him alone.

"I'm an idiot. I think I know how to get out of here."

Astrid was slightly confused and embarrassed. She had tried kissing him for a third time and missed, and then after what she thought was an awkward pause, Hiccup randomly jumped to a solution on how to get out of here. Boys were weird. "Okâ€¦ no argument on the idiot thing, but how do we get out?"

"Remember how all dragons, well most dragons, have a sweet spot around their jaws? I think if we can scratch Toothless there we can get out."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

"There is a slight problemâ€¦"

"What?"

"His head is a bit further up than I can reach. He has my feet, errâ€¦ foot caught in between his hind legs. You will have to do it."

"My arms are stuck behind you."

"I can move my arms so you can reach up, but that's not the problem."

"Well, what is the problem?"

"Well, you're umâ€¦ on top of me and uhhâ€¦ you need to go further up.. and err.. you're a girl, soâ€¦"

Astrid saw where he was going. Her face lit up a very peculiar shade



of red again before she grit her teeth. "We have to get out of here. Turn your head and close your eyes or I will feed you to Stormfly."

Hiccup gulped and nodded his head before lifting his arms and turning his head while closing his eyes. Astrid started to scoot against Hiccup and tried to get within arm's reach of wherever Toothless' jaw was. Unfortunately for poor Hiccup, he felt every single move she made and it wasn't helping keep his mind exactly pure. So he started reciting numbers and equations that he had come up with while building things at the forge. When her well bound chest finally brushed up against his head, he let out a small gasp. Thankfully, her spiked skirt was doing wonders with distracting him from impure thoughts.

Astrid finally found Toothless' sweet spot and scratched. That was all it took for the giant reptile to lose all motor function and went limp, releasing his Viking body pillow. Astrid and Hiccup tumbled out of his wings and rolled to a stop with Astrid on top. Unfortunately, their immediate feeling of victory and elation was thoroughly squashed as a wooden peg leg stopped in their line of sight. "Well, it's good to see you two getting along so well."

\*\*There you go guys. I am sorry it took me so long to post, but you can thank my younger brother for keeping me in line and writing for you guys. I am extremely thankful for the reviews that I have gotten so far and I truly appreciate your constructive criticism. On that note, let me just add that this story takes place after the movie and doesn't necessarily include the tv series. I haven't seen all of them and I don't want to miss something important concerning it in my story if I included it. Still, I appreciate all of your support and will continue to write this until someone sentences my execution for marring the writing world with my ideas. I don't know when the next update will be, but reviews help me along a lot. I find inspiration in them, knowing that someone took the time to read my story and leave me a word of advice or encouragement. I can't thank you guys enough. You're awesome. So please continue to do so and I'll see you next time!\*\*

### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*Alright, so a couple of things. Firstly, it has been extremely too long since I last updated. Real life caught me in a tizzy and I couldn't seem to find more than ten to twenty minutes of free time during the last couple of months. I apologize for the tardiness of this update. Secondly, I absolutely love Gobber's character. However, I cannot do him justice by writing his unique speech with his accent included in it. I have tried and it sounded more like Shakespeare than Scottish. So please look past his seemingly excellent grammar and punctuation. He is just as eloquent as he was in the movie, so just think of his actual voice and accent when reading his lines. That being said, I hope you enjoy this slight twist that I decided to throw into the story.\*\*

Gobber's smug face was obviously something that neither Viking wanted to see as soon as they escaped. For a moment, no one moved then Astrid pushed off Hiccup and stood up. Hiccup's already throbbing head didn't agree with being slammed back into the ground. He saw stars for a bit, but shook his head to clear them before getting up.

"Well, it's a good thing I found you two so soon. Stoic sent me to find the both of you." Gobber's self-satisfied smile never left his face.

Hiccup decided that it would be best if he just stayed quiet. Acting under pressure wasn't one of his strengths—last time that happened, he lost a foot. Astrid, however, charged forward with a red face and an all business attitude. "Alright, did he say why he wanted to meet us?" She straightened out her shirt and skirt, then her slightly mussed hair. She didn't usually care what she looked like, but she had to do something with her hands and keeping them to herself at the moment prevented her explaining to the chief why Gobber got a black eye fetching them for him.

"Something about you wanting to kill your own father. Thor's hammer! I've never seen Angnir so shook up. What did you do to him, lass?" Gobber's curiosity had finally overcome his suggestive demeanor. "He had bruises all over him, like he got into a fistfight with a rockslide or the like."

Hiccup glanced at Astrid's broken door or rather lack thereof. He had only seen Angnir fly out of it, but it sounded like he missed the majority of the fight. He looked at the quickly escalating anger rising in Astrid and quickly got her attention. "Why don't we just go see dad and talk about it there?" Hiccup couldn't stop Astrid's rage, but he thought if his dad, Gobber, Angnir, Toothless, Thornado, and himself all worked together, they could keep the body count to a minimum. He started walking home, hoping they would follow. After hearing Astrid's soft footfalls and the clunk-step of Gobber behind him, he let out his breath in a relieved sigh. He looked over his shoulder to see Toothless start to wake up and look around for him. When the dragon caught sight of him he loped over to walk beside him with confused eyes. No doubt wondering how the both of them escaped. Hiccup grinned at him and scratched his ear before trying to break the silence, trying to build his courage through the closeness of his best friend. "Bruises ,huh? Must have been quite the fight." Hiccup glanced at Astrid and saw her smile.

"Nah. He just kept running, he wouldn't fight back." Gods how she scared him sometimes. He had to keep her talking. If he let her think on it too much, she'd no doubt kill someone on the way. Ok, so maybe that was an exaggeration, but to be safe, he'd keep her mind occupied. Not to mention his own mind was buzzing like a bunch of angry bees at the moment. He didn't want to think of what had happened just yet. He didn't exactly know how to interpret some of the things that were said while cocooned inside his night fury.

"Still, you knocked him straight through your front door. We built those things to withstand Dragons." He tried to sound impressed, but it came out shaky and sounded more like wonder and fear. He had made the metal bands to hold the door together himself and it still frightened him a little to know that she had the amount of strength in her to bend solid iron just by throwing someone at it.

"Yeah, I'm getting better at my unarmed combat." She grinned at Hiccup in what he interpreted as a menacing way. Hiccup gulped and saw his dad along with Astrid's standing behind him on top of the hill in front of the house. He gulped as he thought about what was about to unfold. Without realizing it, he had moved slightly closer

to his dragon.

Gobber pushed past the two and greeted the chief. "I got them. You wouldn't believe what they were doing either!" He chuckled and both of the teens turned red. Astrid from anger or embarrassment, Hiccup couldn't tell. She lunged past Hiccup and punched Gobber in the arm. With a surprised yelp of pain, Gobber rubbed his arm then started laughing. "She's right, she is getting better at unarmed combat!"

Stoic shook his head and sighed, motioning for Astrid to calm down. "Peace, lass. We're here to talk, not to fight." Stoic glanced at his son behind the obviously upset girl. He was twitching again and he couldn't seem to keep his hands still. The chief moved his attention back to the girl. "Let's all go inside and talk in private, hmm?" And with that, he turned around and walked into his hall.

Astrid scoffed at the idea of no violence during this 'talk'. However, her chief had asked her to go into his own hall. Ever the dutiful Viking, she followed a humming Gobber into the bright hall and caught herself musing at how much bigger the hall was compared to her own family's hall. Apparently, being chief of the tribe allowed for certain benefits that extended to his family members. She looked behind her and saw Hiccup shuffling next to Toothless in a daze. He looked so pensive, like his mind just wouldn't let him stop thinking. He was always thinking about something but this time it looked like whatever was plaguing his mind was certainly affecting him. He never looked up as he grabbed the door and closed it behind Toothless and continued to run his hands around his arms or twiddle his thumbs. Astrid turned her attention forward, but continued thinking about the boy. She knew that something had happened that neither one of them could really explain. Something had shifted and changed and both of them was not sure what that meant or how to deal with it. Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she decided to simply think of one problem at a time. Murder her father, solve problem with Hiccup. Yeah, that was the agenda that she would set for herself.

After finally arriving in the house and watching a very distracted Hiccup close the door behind them, Stoic launched right into the conversation. "Alright, now I'm sure that this must be something that is new to the both of you. But you have to listen to both of us before you go crushing skulls." He gave a meaningful look at Astrid. "Your father and I have been in discussion about this particular contract for a good while now and we have finally agreed to the terms just yesterday. We want to hurry this along and have you two married soon." Stoic ended with a happy smile that seemed to contradict Astrid's outraged and almost confused visage.

Astrid took a couple of breaths to calm herself. She was angry, yes. However, her anger wouldn't do her any good right now. She had to get to the bottom of this sudden contract between her and Hiccup. "Why do you want us married so quickly?" She looked pointedly at her father, who had regained some courage and smiled back at her in a fatherly way. It threw her off to see her father act so noble when they were virtually talking about pawning her off to another man. She wasn't an item to be sold to the highest bidder!

Stoic cleared his throat and proceeded. "As you know, before the village enters into the winter and it freezes very heavily, we have a lot to prepare for. That includes helping other villages and tribes

in their preparations as well. Some of the more remote islands do not have as bountiful supply of food as Berk does. We are their allies and we trade with them for other goods."

"Stop chasing around the bush, you ninny. Get to the meat of the matter." Gobber finally slapped the chief on the shoulder. Astrid silently thanked Gobber for his lack of patience as it was getting more irritating to watch their rather large chief skirt around the subject.

Stoic sighed and then took a step towards Astrid, motioning Hiccup to come closer. He knelt down on one knee and looked both of them in the eyes. Astrid started to get a little nervous at seeing the intensity of his stare. "I want the both of you to look into my eyes. I want what is best for Berk and its people, yourselves included. Hiccup is my son and he is of age to be married. Now I want both of you to tell me that you dislike one another. That you can't see either of you ever getting married in the future. I want you to say it here and mean every word of it. Can you do that?" He waited patiently for their responses.

Astrid felt trapped. She wanted to reassure the chief that she was in no way interested in Hiccup. That she was going to remain a shield maiden for the rest of her life. She was perfectly happy with her dragon Stormfly and her trusty axe. But that would be a lie. She did like Hiccup. Maybe a little, tiny bit more than a friend. And she couldn't say that she hadn't thought of being married to him. Every girl has a dream or two about it sometime in their life. But she was a Viking! Vikings don't succumb to those picturesque scenes of love and niceness. No, they freeze to death in the winter by themselves and kill all of those that anger them or insult them for going soft. So of course she wanted to assure the chief that she wanted to be alone. But for some reason, her traitorous eyes decided to shift over and take a quick glance at the boy beside her. He looked shocked and nervous as his bottom lip was being chewed on and his fists clenched until they were white. His face shouted that he was scared and at the same time, he remained silent, squinting his eyes as if in pain. He was trying so hard to do something, she could see.

Her mind suddenly recalled what she had said to him inside Toothless earlier and her thoughts went into overdrive. She said that she didn't want to marry him. That she wasn't ready. Neither was he. Both of them had so much that they wanted to do, so many years ahead of them to accomplish their goals. So why was the chief saying that they needed to marry so early? She knew that Vikings tend to marry earlier in life, but that was due to the dragon attacks, now that it wasn't a problem anymore, she thought that all of this early marriage nonsense would fade away. So why-A sudden thought flitted across her mind that actually terrified her. Other tribesâ€|they didn't know that the dragons had stopped attacking. They were still marrying young. And Hiccup was the son of another tribe's chief.

Astrid looked at Stoic suddenly, her eyes filled with understanding. He resolutely looked at her as if confirming her fear. She didn't know why, but the thought of Hiccup being married off to another tribe scared her. Her fears were not controlled by this gangly and short boy next to her. No, she was a Viking! Fear didn't exist for her! So why did she have to fight her body to keep it from shaking with dread. She understood why Stoic was asking them this. It was either marry Hiccup or have any chance of ever being with him taken

away. She hurriedly looked back at Hiccup and saw slight traces of tears run down his face and blood come out his lip. He knew.

Hiccup opened his mouth and took a deep breath and looked determinedly at his father. "Dad, I dislike Ast-"

He was suddenly interrupted by a punch to his ribcage and a voice next to him. "Chief, I understand. I support the contract you have signed with my father." Astrid felt her knees go weak and an all new kind of dread fill her. She was giving away any sort of freedom that she could have to keep Hiccup from marrying someone else. She didn't really understand her decision at all and Hiccup's almost answer enraged her. She didn't know why he was going to say what he almost did and it made her act before she thought. She thought they were friends! How could he just throw that away! She blurted the first thing that came to her mind and now she was stuck. Stoic nodded once, then stood back up.

"Then we are in agreement! As I said, we will have the marriage after the storm settles. Preparations will start now and then we'll have something to celebrate before the winter comes!" He slapped Angnir on the back and punched Gobber in the arm. The other two men both had smiles on their faces and somehow produced mugs of mead from behind them, which they began to consume with gusto. Astrid sent a withering look at Hiccup and quickly exited the door. She had to find Stormfly and fly to the woods. Anger had boiled through her throughout the entire conversation, but for some reason when Hiccup went to voice his dislike for her to the chief, it made her see red. Her fury had consumed her and she made a rash decision on the spot. She wasn't going to go back there and take back what she said to the chief, though. Her word had been given and she would remain true to it. Even if she had to marry a boy she currently hated at the moment. Finally making it to her house after a mad dash through the village, she went out to the dragon stable and called for Stormfly.

The dragon was beside her rider in an instant. Her head was cocked to the side as if confused, but it went away as soon as Astrid saddled her and mounted her. "Let's go girl." Stormfly squawked an excited affirmation and then took off into the sky. On the way up, she vaguely saw Hiccup exit his house with his head down. Not that she was looking for him or anything, Valhalla no. She was just checking to see if there were any fires that she had to put out before she left. Her years on the fire brigade had obviously made it a habit to her that she just now noticed, yes that must be it. She harrumphed in renewed anger and flew off over the woods to her usual killing grounds.

Hiccup felt absolutely horrible. His side hurt from Astrid's sudden strike, his lip was bleeding, his hands had gash marks in them from his own fingernails, but the thing that hurt him the most was the current muscle that was beating in his chest. He had seen the hateful glare of most all the villagers in the past, but he had never seen Astrid so angry at him and it devastated him. He didn't understand her anger this time, either. He was trying to fulfil what he told her earlier that very morning! He wouldn't let her get married to him if she didn't want to. Then, right as he was getting ready to set her free of marrying him, she jumps in and says that she is alright with it!? He was supremely confused on what she wanted. She told him one thing and then does the opposite of what she says later.

Toothless trotted next to Hiccup and just watched the different emotions play across his face. Until he finally became unamused by his rider's undoubtedly self-destructive thoughts and nudged his arm to get his attention. Hiccup turned to his best friend and looked at the lonely reptile. "Sorry bud, I didn't mean to forget about you. It's just that a lot has happened today and- \*sigh\* You know what. I think we need to go flying. That sound good to you, bud?" Toothless unabashedly let his tongue hang out of his mouth and smiled at his boy. Hiccup situated himself on the saddle and readied himself for the gut wrenching takeoff that Toothless was so accustomed to.

The Night Fury didn't disappoint, either. The ground left them abruptly and Hiccup was pretty sure that part of his meal stayed with it. Finally leveling out, he raised his arms to the sky and felt the wind caress his face in a pleasant cool rush. He would never get tired of this. The air had opened up so much possibility for Hiccup when he rode Toothless. On the ground, the plodding pace of walking felt mechanical and continued to remind him of his missing limb. The screeching metal that refused to stay oiled enough to be silent grated on his nerves and announced his crippled status to any and everyone that could hear him coming. In the air, though, he was free. The only sound that could reach him was the rush of the wind and the occasional whine or groan of his partner. Everything seemed so far away from him as he watched the tiny islands below him. Problems that seemed so large in every day Viking life just melted away and stayed on the ground where it was expected to be solved. Toothless could feel Hiccup's spirit come back to him and decided to accelerate in a fit of happiness.

The clouds rushed to meet them until Hiccup maneuvered his feet around into a dive. Speed was the one trait that defined both of them in flight and it was a very addictive drug that they indulged in on as many occasions as they could. The boy and his dragon watched as the ground continued to grow larger by the second and relished the feeling of the wind slicing its icy talons across their skin, leaving nothing but a screeching noise as the Night Fury announced his coming. With a quick repositioning of his feet and a flare of wings, Toothless and Hiccup were thrown into each other as they slowed to a more manageable pace and enjoyed the day at a leisurely pace. They could do this all day and not grow tired of it, but they both knew that Hiccup had things he had to do today. With a worried and inquisitive look, Toothless looked back at Hiccup. "It's nothing, bud." Toothless gave him a ridiculous look that could be summed up as the 'yeah, right!' look. "Alright, fine. I'm getting married soon and my future wife absolutely hates my guts. I try to make her happy and I revert back to my old tried and true of screwing everything up. I am seriously afraid of marriage by itself, but add Astrid with an axe into the mix and let's just say that I'm surprised I don't have wet shorts at the moment." Toothless shook his head and snorted. "Oh, like you are any better! I don't see you chasing after any girl dragons, Mr. Smooth."

Toothless huffs indignantly and circles back towards Berk. Unfortunately, Hiccup saw the horizon and his dad was right. There was a nasty storm coming from the ocean and it would hit pretty soon. Hiccup couldn't see the end of the clouds that were coming and silently thanked Thor for that. The longer that this storm put off the wedding, the better the chances were that Astrid would come to her senses and cancel the contract.

Shifting his thoughts from marriage, Hiccup went back to thinking how it was nice that he got the last line in before when he argued with Toothless. The dragon hardly ever let him win an argument. Hiccup was feeling pretty good about himself, that is until Toothless decided to take a slight detour and flew him over the woods. "What are you doing, bud? I got a lot to do today." Toothless grumbled a bit. "Ok, fine. One quick lap around the woods, then we head back, deal?" Toothless grunted an affirmative and then took off a bit faster. The young Viking let the wind wash his worries away and just closed his eyes for a bit. He trusted Toothless and he knew that he wouldn't fall off. His slight acquisition of peace was interrupted as his best bud finally spotted what he was looking for and began to dive. Hiccup gave a yelp and held on for dear life as the trees suddenly reached up to him.

Toothless came out of his dive and landed with a thump, causing his rider to move forward a bit and unlatch himself from his saddle. Then, the reptile went over to an outcropping to talk to a certain Nadder in the vicinity.

Hiccup hit the ground with a thud and blearily got his bearings before he stood up and rubbed his back. "Ha ha, very funny. Get back here, you useless re-" Hiccup finally turned and saw something that scared the crap out of him. A certain blonde haired Viking with a battle axe raised and ready to throw. "Gah!" Hiccup dove for cover and barely dodged the incoming projectile.

"What are you doing here?" Astrid's voice drifted over to him from his right and she didn't sound happy.

"Working on my reflexes?" It was the first thing that came to his mind and although he meant it as a joke, he saw the glint in her eyes that promised pain if he didn't answer correctly. "Uhhâ€¦ I meanâ€¦ I came here because apparently Toothless likes watching me lose things." Astrid sighed at her bad luck and went to retrieve her axe. On her way there, Hiccup stood up and dusted himself off. "So did you throw the axe before or after you knew who I was?"

Astrid jerked her weapon from the tree with a grunt and turned to him, still brandishing it at the ready. "After." Hiccup felt the air distinctly chill after that and immediately went on the defensive.

"Oh. Well, thatâ€¦that isâ€¦not good." Hiccup felt like mentally slapping his head. Out of all the responses he could have used, that's the one he answered with? What was he? Snotlout? "I mean, Iâ€¦uhâ€¦ probably deserved that."

He shifted from foot to metal foot awkwardly when he heard a sound that he knew too well. Both him and Astrid looked up towards where their dragons were and watched both of them run off towards Berk at top speed. "Great, just great." Hiccup's sarcasm dripped off of his words as he turned to look at Astrid quickly becoming enraged.

"You planned this, didn't you!" Astrid made two steps forward and shoved her axe head into his chin, forcing him back into an outcropping of rock behind him.

"I had nothing to do with this. You can thank Toothless for all this. Honest." Hiccup pleaded with her.

Astrid gave one last shove with her weapon before turning and letting out an angry groan. "Why couldn't it have been anyone else but you? Why did you have to come in here and try to tick me off even more? Do you like getting the crap beat out of you?" She was pacing back and forth, obviously angry with him.

Hiccup sat down and tried to look as unassuming as possible. He didn't think that it could get much worse than an angry Astrid out in the woods alone with him. After all, if she did decide to kill him, she could easily get away with it and say it was a bear or something that got him. He gulped and tried to shake off the nervousness brought on by his ever present pessimism. Well, at least now that all the bad luck has settled in, maybe good things will start to happen.

No sooner than he thought this did it start to rain. "Ah. The gods hate me."

#### 4. Chapter 4

**\*\*Hey everyone! I'm glad to see that this story is moving right along! I told you before that I'm a little irregular in my updates, so expect sporadic postings in the near future. A huge shout out to (in my opinion) one of the best authors this fandom has to offer, Midoriko-Sama! My little brother and I literally just finished reading the two stories that she posted and it really stoked the fires of inspiration in me! It was literally her first review of last chapter that coaxed me into writing this out as fast as I possibly could. That being said, I hope you enjoy this next installment!\*\***

Hiccup knew that the rain wouldn't stop soon and that waiting it out in the forest would result in a serious case of death from an enraged axe woman. So when Astrid finally stopped shouting at him for bringing misfortune to her yet again, he calmly stood and looked at the ground. Astrid must have took this as his submission to her anger and finally allowed herself to feel that he was on the road to being properly chastised. After all, he didn't receive an axe blow to the head, but instead a sigh of resignation accompanied with her annoyed, "We had better get back to the village. I don't want to be out here and add getting sick to the list of your many screw ups today." She huffed and marched past him, forcefully ramming her shoulder into his in passing.

Being bullied by others was something that Hiccup was unusually used to, however when Astrid did it, the pain seemed to almost be unbearable. She had never done it before and he thought that it was because she despised acting like Snotlout. His assumptions seemed somewhat moot at this point as he was starting to feel like he did before he became friends with Toothless. Slumping his shoulders in defeat once again, he trailed after Astrid silently and hoped that she would just ignore him on the journey home.

His hopes were dashed short as he heard her gasp and pant like she was out of breath. He knew that she had been training, but she sounded fine earlier. He looked up at her and saw her swinging her axe unnecessarily at a clump of brush that they could both just as easily walk around. There is not much that escapes his attention when



it is fully captured by something and it was during this berserker-like rage that Hiccup finally saw the reason behind her anger. Astrid was a fine Viking and one of the most talented youths of her generation. Her mastery of the Viking way was only surpassed by his giant of a father. Things like fear and sadness did not have a place in Viking society, so it was masked with anger, honor, mead, and other things of the like. Vikings did not know how to react to feeling scared or depressed, so they sought comfort in the feelings that they reveled in and Astrid was no exception to that fact. So when he saw the smallest glimmer of despair show itself in her eyes for a moment before it was drowned in rage, he understood why she was so bent out of shape about all of this.

There are a great many things that Hiccup has done in the recent months of his life that has made him change in ways he had not anticipated. Befriending Toothless had led to him becoming the hero of Berk and hugging Astrid inside Toothless which led to this mess just to name a couple. However, on both occasions, he was not thinking of himself and he did not think of himself this time. So, almost out of reflex, his hand came up to rest on Astrid's shoulder, bringing her attention to him for a moment. She turned as if to strike him, but was met with a burning gaze of emerald determination that stayed her hand and froze her in place. "Tell me." Was all that he said. It was confusing, it was infuriating, it was unexpected, and it was exactly what she needed to hear at the moment.

"Tell you? Tell you what?" Astrid tried to look confused, but Hiccup saw through her admittedly poor acting skills.

"Tell me why. You were so against marrying me when we talked earlier, then change your mind right in front of my dad. It just doesn't make sense and I can't apologize to you until I know what I did wrong." Hiccup finally ground out. He wasn't angry, but his confusion and drive to help her outweighed his common sense. Fortunately for him, it was enough of a question to make Astrid stumble back away from him and drop her aggressive stance.

"You want to apologize? You think that it will make it all better? What's done is done, Hiccup. You can't change anything now and an apology will do nothing to make a difference. You may have tricked me into believing you once, but not again. I trusted you earlier when you said that you would help me and now look where we are! Exactly in the place that I wanted to avoid!" Astrid steadily got louder as she spoke, screaming at him in the end. Her voice only challenged by the steady rainfall around them.

Hiccup watched as her hair stuck to her face and the water run down her cheeks. He knew it was the rain, but he couldn't help but imagine them being her tears as she yelled so desperately at him. He didn't like confrontation or contention and avoided it at all costs. However, if it was something he could not avoid, he did not turn from it. "I tried. I was going to tell my father that we wouldn't make a good match. I was trying to help you!"

"Help me? You'd be condemning me to a life full of guilt! Did you not think that I wouldn't find out that you would have had to marry another clan's daughter if you didn't marry me? I would have been consumed with the knowledge that I forced that on you! What kind of life would that have been?" Astrid was near hysterical. Hiccup could see the truth behind her words and it threw him off guard.

"What? I would have been married off to another chief's daughter? Where did you come up with that?" He was wracking his brain, trying to find where she could have come to that assumption. Granted, when the chief had brought them into the house and demanded to hear from either one of them that there was nothing between them, he was a little out of sorts. He had made up his mind to make sure that Astrid didn't get married, but the way his father asked the question, it made it seem that he would have to give up on ever marrying her again in the future. Pictures of her married to another man had filled his head and it made him angry both at himself and at the situation. He had bit his lip and fisted his hands in an attempt to calm his raging emotions and tried to muster up enough courage to give up something he so desperately wanted in the future.

"Oh, don't tell me the great Hiccup didn't think of that! You knew about it and-" Astrid was about to go on, but Hiccup stopped her with a palm in front of her, signaling her to stop for a moment.

"I didn'tâ€¦" Hiccup breathed out heavily and shaking until he regained his composure. "I didn't do it because of that." He finally found that he did not like the rain falling against him and suddenly took a step around Astrid. He was hurt that Astrid had only wanted to marry him because of her guilt. To be honest, he didn't really expect anything spectacular as to why she said that she would, but knowing the real reason behind her actions made his aching heart feel cold and dull in his chest. Either from this new revelation or from the cold rain, he felt numb all over. He was done talking and thanked the downpour while he walked on as it masked his flowing tears.

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><p>Astrid was stunned for a second or two. She never thought that Hiccup would stand up to her like he just did. Then had the nerve to just up and leave her behind. That boy made her so angry sometimes and she wasn't sure if going after him was such a good idea at the moment. She wasn't too confident in her ability to keep herself from strangling him. Instead, she chose to raise her axe and continue in slaying innocent trees and underbrush. That is, until she remembered that it was still raining. She wondered in quiet silence how Hiccup could make her forget about the weather as it was literally tapping her on the head to remind her of its presence.<p>

Deciding that she couldn't afford to be sick in the coming days, she ran towards the village on a different path than the one Hiccup had taken earlier. Above all, she did not want to meet up with him again until she could get her anger under control.

The path ahead of her seemed to blur as she fell victim to her stray thoughts. She could not help but replay the words that he had spoken before he parted with her. Errant questions such as why he did it flew into her conscience. She quickly shook her head and made a point not to think about it until later. He was the one that wronged her, so why should she care why he did it? Besides, she was a Viking. Thinking about things usually led to a lot of bad things. Look at what it did to Hiccup before he met Toothless.

Astrid became even more enraged as she involuntarily brought the walking fishbone back into her thoughts. She was tired of all the things that he forced her to feel. Vikings don't have mushy feelings,

they have stone cold steel and chorded muscle that they thrived on. Thanks to his little speech earlier, she was less of a Viking now. Yeah, that was it. Hiccup was so bad at being a Viking, he made the Vikings that were close to him even worse! When she saw him again, he was going to die! Astrid turned a little and seriously considered going and hunting down the boy to exact her revenge for making her less of a Viking until a very poignant thought entered her mind. He killed the Queen of the dragon's nest, saved her from falling to death in battle with said Queen, and then single handedly changed an entire tribe's views on dragons.

A very frustrated sigh escaped her lips at the thought of how Hiccup's story was more Viking-like than her own. Who was the one that trained for combat from sunup to sundown? Who was the Viking that continually worked her muscles until they screamed at her to stop and then worked them some more? She did! And all that hard work for nothing! The image of Stormfly entered her head. No, it wasn't for nothing. She gained a truly great friend and confidant that she just didn't have before. Dammit! She couldn't even be angry at him for that! Astrid huffed and finally saw the village ahead of her. "Screw it, I'll think about it tomorrow."

The storm had made the sky darker than usual and with all the rain, no torches were really lit either. Astrid was at least glad that it was light enough for her to see her house before taking one last look up the hill at the chief's house. It had smoke rolling out of the chimney and all seemed well. Unfortunately, she thought. Willing the house to explode from night fury plasma blasts mentally, she closed her eyes and then opened them again. When it didn't happen, she rolled her eyes and finally entered her own.

Well, she reached for the door to enter her home, only to realize that it still wasn't fixed yet. Dang. She hadn't thought of that until now. It will be even harder to stay warm tonight when all she could do was prop a piece of furniture up in front of the doorway to keep the rain out. Sighing, she went on up to her room, soaking wet and feeling a lot colder than she liked.

Stormfly met her in her room as she flung her wet clothes off of her. The vain dragon had accidentally blasted a hole in her roof not too long ago and Hiccup had worked with her to build a trap door for the dragon to enter her bedroom when she wished. Arg! Why is it everything that she thought of today involved him? She threw her wet tunic at the contraption in a fit of anger and watched it splat against the door and fall down onto the floor. Stormfly cocked her head to the side and squawked in confusion at her rider's behavior. Astrid looked at her dragon and decided that she was also responsible for the mess she was in as well. "Don't try to play innocent with me. You left me behind when you came back to town!" Stormfly had the decency to look ashamed before she stood and went over to nudge her rider and ask for forgiveness.

Unfortunately, Astrid was in the middle of putting on dry clothes when she did and easily became unbalanced after being seemingly tackled by a giant dragon. Her feet were caught in her leggings and she fell over towards her bedpost. Luckily, the dragon reacted quick enough to extend its wing and stop her before she landed. Astrid was grateful that she had been caught and let the anger fade away towards her dragon. After being righted, she clung to the reptile with a mighty grasp, not a foolish and childish thing called a hug. So what

if they looked a lot alike, only true Vikings could hold a dragon stillâ€¦yeah, that's what she was doing, holding her dragon still. After all, she didn't want to be knocked over again.

Stormfly unfurled her wings and enveloped her rider with them. Warmth immediately infused Astrid while she breathed in and out as the steady rhythm of Stormfly's heartbeat lulled her into relaxation. It didn't matter that she was still partially soaked or that her dragon was wet, this embrace was exactly what she needed at the moment. Her anger had finally dissipated and those weird feelings of sadness and confusion returned in its absence. She would not cry, she had promised herself that she would never do so. So instead, she just tightened her hold around her companion and closed her eyes. Stormfly seemed to understand her feelings and crooned in comfort before wrapping her tail around her as well and squeezing in sympathy. The last thing that crossed Astrid's mind was of course how this felt compared to being hugged by Hiccup inside toothless. Her heart suddenly ached and the world disappeared into darkness.

Astrid woke to the sound of furniture being slid across a wooden floor. The screeching and grinding noise traveled upstairs and through her closed door to bombard her ears. Stormfly had moved at some point during the time that she was napping with her and now lay next to her, but still had her tail around Astrid's waist. Astrid sighed and remembered that someone had to move some furniture in front of the door to keep the rain out. She wanted to go back to sleep, but her stomach had other ideas. It rumbled loudly in protest and forced her to get up and look for something edible. So finally rearranging her clothes to where they should be, since she had somehow thought making sure her dragon didn't tip her over was more important than getting fully dressed earlier, she made her way downstairs.

She was a little ways down the stairs when she spotted her father groaning to move a weapons rack that was fully loaded into the proper position against the wall. "What are you doing, dad?" She asked, stopping on the stairs.

"Well, good evening to you as well, sleeping beauty! Nice to see you up and about! I'm just putting all the furniture back where it belongs." He gave a particularly mighty heave and set the weapons rack in its usual place.

"Putting it back in place? Why?" Astrid couldn't keep the knowing smirk off of her face as she waited for her father to explain about the door that HE was thrown out of by HER.

Angnir turned to look at his daughter with a devilish smirk on his face. It made her feel uncomfortable seeing as every time he had that look it meant he was up to something or knew something she didn't. "Well, you know how we were having problems with our old door? Well, I was at Stoic's and in the middle of talking about the upcoming wedding, my future son-in-law strides right in, soaked to the bone. I asked the lad if he was alright and he nodded that he was, then he went up to his room and came back downstairs with some tools. He asked me if I had any spare wood he could use to fix our door and I told him that we had some in the back where we used to keep your dragon." Astrid had a sinking feeling in her gut, but Angnir seemed oblivious to that fact and continued with his story. "So the next thing I know, he starts heading out and Stoic stops him for a second.

He says 'You're soaked to the bare bones, Hiccup! Why don't you change first, you'll catch your death out there like that.' And then the boy says, 'I'll get wet anyway, no use in getting more clothes drenched.' Then walks on out in the rain with nary a thought." Angnir took a glance at his daughter.

Astrid was pale as a ghost and her fists clenched. Angnir thought it had something to do with remembering how cold she felt. "Don't worry, Astrid, I'll get the fire going soon. After all, you and Hiccup must have been soaked fixing the door!" He made his way over to the fireplace and began to start a fire when he heard Astrid's voice.

"I didn't help fix the door, dad. I was in my room sleeping." Her voice contained truth in it, but a little bit of sadness and anger as well. After the fire was properly started, he went back into the kitchen and grabbed a tankard for him and his daughter.

"Oh. Well, either way, the door is fixed and looks like it should. I'm glad that I will have such a handy son-in-law soon!" He meant to sound jovial, but knew that it would get under Astrid's skin pretty easily. He knew that the best way to get the complete truth out of his daughter was through her anger.

She didn't disappoint, either. Straightening her shoulders, she yelled back defiantly. "I'm so happy that your life will be sooo much better now that you've destroyed mine! Couldn't sell me off fast enough, huh? Had to make sure that you picked someone rich too, like the chief's son!" Her eyes were glassy, but no tears left them. Righteous fury boiled in her stomach and heated her face.

Angnir filled his tankard with mead and hers with water before calmly setting them down on the table. Then he slowly walked over to Astrid. "Astrid, you are of age. You need to find yourself a husband and have children." Most parents wouldn't try to anger the same child that threw them out of the door earlier that day, but Angnir felt that this was something important to Astrid. He needed to get to the root of the problem and if making her mad got him there, then so be it.

"Oh? I HAVE to do that? What rule says that I have to settle down and be soâ€¦soâ€¦DOMESTIC? I'm a Viking! I tame the seas and conquer the lands with my fighting skills! I haven't went on any adventures or seen the other lands outside of Berk! I want to do so much more than just sit and sew all the day long and take care of a man while HE gets to go live HIS dreams while I can't! I haven't even been given the chance to prove to everyone that I'm as good as Hiccup!" Astrid was screaming towards the end but stopped immediately afterwards. She had of course felt that her dreams were squashed when she was told that she was going to get married, but the nagging feeling that she had around Hiccup was nameless and silent until she screamed it at her father. Her anger at how fast he had gotten his fame with the people of Berk was suppressed with the feeling of guilt after looking at what it cost him. She may have blood, sweat, and tears invested in her gradually growing fame, but he lost an entire foot in order to overcome something that could have wiped out the entire village.

Angnir nodded his head. There was the meat of the matter. "Alright lass, listen to me. You know as well as I that you are not inferior to the boy. He has no backbone, can't fight at all, his ideas mostly

cause the village more grief than good, and he is terribly scrawny. That being said, he is worth as much as you are. In this village, every Viking relies on one another. When fighting in the shield wall, it is as equals, not as masters and servants or lesser and betters. And if I know him at all, he won't make you give up on your dreams. The boy is absolutely smitten with you." Angnir finished his speech and waited for his daughter to cheer up.

Unfortunately for the man, his hopes didn't come true. Astrid stood there, listening to her father and admittedly starting to feel better about herself. That is, until her father said that last sentence. In an instant, the image of Hiccup flashed in her head. "I didn'tâ€¦" Hiccup breathed out heavily and shaking until he regained his composure. "I didn't do it because of that." And then her heart wrenched in agony. It felt as though someone was grasping it in an iron fist and twisting. She knew now. She knew why he did it. Her conversation with him while they were in Toothless ran through her head, his promise to keep her from marrying right now. He was trying to set her free. The blood coming from his bottom lip, his hands dripping the red essence as well, all to try and make himself let her go. Even if he didn't want to, he tried toâ€¦for her sake. Her face bunched up and she tried mightily to stop the flow of tears threatening to come out of her eyes. So far she was succeeding, but just barely.

Her facial expressions caught the attention of Angnir and he beckoned her to him softly. She walked down the rest of the stairs and came to stand in front of him. "What is the matter, Astrid? Tell me." He looked at her with concern and placed a hand on her shoulder.

His hand came up to rest on her shoulder, bringing her attention to him for a moment. She turned as if to strike him, but was met with a burning gaze of emerald determination that stayed her hand and froze her in place. "Tell me." Was all that he said.

Astrid brought her hands to her mouth and stifled a sharp gasp of pain. Her eyes becoming blurry, but yet to shed tears. "I can't. I did something terrible today. But I can'tâ€¦ I can't." Finally a couple of tears made their silent trek down her cheeks. She quickly wiped them away. "Dammit! It's so stupid! I can't cry about it, Vikings don't cry about stupid things like this!" She tried to mask her hurt and sadness with anger, but it just didn't seem to work this time.

Then warm arms embraced her and she was pulled into the chest of a man twice her size. His blonde beard soaking up the still barely forming tears into it. "It's true. Vikings do not cry over things such as this. But while you are in here with me, you are my daughter, Astrid Hofferson. So let me be enough Viking for the both of us and just be my daughter for now. Be Astrid and let the tears come. I'll be here to make sure no one sees them." His hands rubbing circles on her back and his voice vibrated from his massive chest.

Hearing those words, Astrid couldn't hold back the all consuming flood of emotions that burst from within her. Reaching around and hugging her father, she let the tears come forth as she sobbed heavily into his chest. She let her sadness bleed out of her bit by bit and all her sorrows melt out of her as she cried next to the heart of the man that held her now.

Angnir felt his own sadness well up inside of him, but fought it back. It hurt him to see his daughter like this and he knew that this was necessary. However, it clawed at his very soul and pulled at his heartstrings when he felt the dampness of his beard begin to soak into his tunic. Still, he muscled through the pain and resolutely held the last and most important member of his family left. His little girl, Astrid.

**\*\*Alright everyone! I know this one wasn't exactly as light hearted as the others, but I hope I didn't disappoint too much on the romantic side of things. Yes, it's a bit angsty, but I think that it fit their characters pretty well. A big shout out to Midoriko-Sama for the excellent advice she gave me and to those of you who reviewed the story! I'll list all of the people at the beginning of the next chapter to thank you all for your support! While on that topic, I implore each and every one of you that feels like this story deserves a review to do so. It really helps keep me motivated and gives me some ideas along the way! Thanks for all your support and I hope that you continue reading Peculiarities of Love!\*\***

## 5. Chapter 5

**\*\*Alright everyone! I'm back and I come bearing gifts! First and foremost, I have to fulfill a promise I made last time. So bear with me and look at those that have reviewed chapter 3 for me! They are listed as thus: Midoriko-sama, xXMizz Alec VolturiXx\*\* , \*\*Soul Razor, dancingRAINBOWS, AngryHenry, and Bane348. All of these people gave me the inspiration to move the story in a different direction than I had previously planned and all have helped contribute to the story in some form or fashion. I apologize for the length of time it took me to write this, but let's just say that personal crisis sort of struck while I was halfway through this chapter. I hope to update sooner than this next time, but I can't make promises. The big guy upstairs has his own plans that trump my own too often. \*Phew\* Now that I'm finished honoring those that have reviewed for me, I'll let you get to the real reason you stopped by. I hope you enjoy this next installation of POL!\*\***

Gobber started the morning a little bit earlier than most other Vikings. He had to start the forge and get the fire hot before the break of dawn. As an added bonus, he got the chance to smith in peace during the wee hours of the morning. He'd been doing it for years and would probably do it for years to come as well. So when he finally got the forge running and was almost ready to start pounding out a new weapon, the sight of a sneaky Astrid Hofferson trying to make her way up the hill towards Stoic's house caught his attention pretty fast.

In a Viking village there is precious little that doesn't become common knowledge, so when someone starts sneaking around there are two things that a proper Viking must do. One would be to catch the sneak and find out what they are up to, then decide to let them do it or not. However, the second option was the trickier of the two and had the most benefits, follow the sneak and then gossip about what you saw to other Vikings.

Gobber chuckled to himself and began to follow Astrid at a respectable pace. He was grinning like the devious Viking that he was. That was, of course, until he finally noticed the state that she

was in. Her shirt was all wrinkled, her hair disheveled, and she was missing her maiden band. Thor Almighty! She was missing her maiden band! Gobber went to stifle his gasp with his hand, but got a face full of stone hammer instead. His river stone tooth popped out of his mouth and he scrambled around to catch it before it hit the ground.

Luckily, his antics were masked by the sound of Stoic leaving his house. The door shut with a loud bang as Stoic caught sight of Astrid. Gobber finally caught his tooth and put it back in place before he moved a little closer and started waving his hand and hammer around to get his attention. He got within earshot and heard Astrid ask for Hiccup. Right before Stoic answered her, Gobber finally got his attention and pointed at his head then to Astrid. Stoic looked at Gobber in confusion for a second, then chanced a look at the girl. His face turned crimson, then immediately pale. "Ah. Uh. Yes. Hiccup. My son, Hiccup. He is..uhh.. sick. Yep! Sick. Very sick. I'm on my way to see Gothi to get something to help him. I..uhhâ€¦ I don't want anyone to maybe catch what he has, yeah! So make sure youâ€¦ uhhâ€¦ stay away from him for now. Alright, Astrid?"

Stoic was struggling, but Gobber was very glad that he was able to come up with a great story to cover for his son. Astrid was an adventurous lass, but even she wouldn't disobey the chief's orders. "Is Hiccup going to be alright, Chief?" Astrid sounded more than a little worried and Gobber stored that little bit of information away for the housewives on the island. Who knows? He might get a free dinner out of the deal!

Gobber gave Stoic the thumbs up to congratulate him, but then he heard him continue. "Yes, he'll be fine. He justâ€¦ uhhâ€¦ cut his thumb off!" Gobber dropped his arm and opened his mouth in disbelief of Stoic. The man could never tell a lie to save his life. Most of the time, that would be a wonderful trait to have, but Gobber quickly saw the disadvantages to it now. He quickly shook his head side to side and waved at Stoic to stop. "But we stopped it from bleeding and sewed it back on! Then he.." Stoic kept looking at Gobber for help. Gobber gave him the universal sign for cut it out and drew his hand horizontally in front of his neck. "Then he tried to cut his throat open andâ€¦" Gobber hit his head with his hammer in dismay. How did he misunderstand that? "â€¦ hit his head with a hammer. But we stopped him from all that and now he's home and sick and I have to find Gothi. So don't go near him today, ok?" Ugh. Finally Gobber shook his head and then motioned for Stoic to meet him at the forge. He'd done enough damage today. He turned a corner and shook his head at his battle-brother's antics.

After getting to the forge, Gobber turned to face the door expectantly. Stoic entered not moments later, his face smiling in glee. "Did you see it, Gobber! My son! MY son! Odin, he's a man now!" Stoic was doing his best to keep quiet, he really was, but his voice carried like he was addressing the village nonetheless. Gobber motioned for him to quiet down a bit and made to talk, but was interrupted again. "And Astrid! She really looked roughed up, didn't she? I KNEW that they made up yesterday! 'Fix her door.' Bah! I should have known, that little weasel!" Stoic was practically bouncing on the balls of his feet in joy.

That is, until Gobber finally interrupted him. "Yes yes, the boy whetted his whistle with the womenfolk. Now, Stoic, this isn't a



really good thing." Gobber was trying to sound menacing, but he would be lying if he said he wasn't enjoying this. Hiccup was going to be reminded of this for the rest of his life! Blackmail for the lad to do anything he wanted forever! Still, his safety came first in Gobber's mind and it was the only reason that he was serious at all right now. "Now that Astrid has lost herâ€|errâ€| you knowâ€| what about Angnir?"

Stoic finally settled down and looked stricken for a moment. "Oh no. I hadn't thought of that." He looked back at Gobber. "Maybe we can move the wedding date up a bit?" he asked hopefully.

Gobber laughed derisively "And tell Angnir what exactly? 'I want to move up the wedding date because your daughter might be with child.' Yes, I can see him being very reasonable about it." His sarcasm was completely evident in his voice.

Stoic seemed to think for a moment. This is what Gobber loved about being Stoic's battle brother. Yes, Vikings were bull-headed and stubborn as a frozen Yak, but Stoic was a problem solver. Gobber could fight with even the best of Vikings with all their limbs attached, but a problem solver he was not. More like a problem maker. Like that one time when- "We'll have to talk to Astrid about this."

His thoughts were interrupted by a line he did not see coming at all. "Talk to the lass? Why would we do that? She's partly responsible for Hiccup'sâ€| errâ€| troubles."

"Aye. And she can help us keep this a secret until after the wedding. Then it shouldn't matter anymore. All we have to do is convince her to wear her maiden band and act like it never happened. If the rest of the village sees her still wearing it, then they won't panic. And most of all, Angnir won't try to kill my son, even if he now has the right to." Stoic looked seriously at Gobber. He meant every word he said. Never mind that he had been in a similar predicament earlier in his life. In fact, that's probably what made him want to do it this way. It worked last time.

"Fine, Stoic. I'll say nary a word. At least, not until after the wedding." Gobber smiled conspiratorially.

Stoic smiled and nodded his head in agreement. "I'll go talk to Astrid, then go talk to Gothi. Meet me in the great hall for some celebratory mead after that! I can't believe it, Gobber! I might be a grandfather! Hahahahaa!" Stoic laughed from his stomach and exited the forge.

Taking a long look at the door, Gobber smiled and felt genuinely happy that his friend was this joyful. Then he looked at the forge. \*sigh\* "And I just started you up." Standing up, he went about putting the fire out and getting ready for an early morning of celebration and drunken singing. It was going to be a good day.

\* \* \*

><p>Astrid felt horrible. No, she felt beyond that. She had woken up in her bed, tucked in and still dressed partially in her armor when she remembered everything that had happened downstairs yesterday. A sudden surge of happiness rose through her at the thought of her

father when she was struck with a very abrupt thought of what she had done to Hiccup. Her happiness left with the coming of said thought and she rose from her bed, determined to make it up to him.<p>

She didn't think of anything other than going up to the boy and making him sit down and listen to her. It may have only been a day since their 'engagement', but she was already tired of the arguments and the feelings that he caused in her. If she was being totally honest with herself, she actually preferred that he talk to her instead of trying to fight it out like other Vikings when they got into disputes. Although she knew that she would win every single argument that way, the intelligence that he was so known for was somewhat attractive.

No! What was she thinking?! Astrid shook her head and tried to clear her obviously sleep muddled head. Deciding that thinking wasn't something that she needed to do at the moment, she got up and started walking to her door. Action is what had always defined her and that's what she needed to do right now. Make things right and beat Hiccup up a little bit for everything that he made her go through! She strode out of her room and down the stairs and spared a glance at her father's closed door. The memories of how he treated her filled her heart and it made her smile. She would have to do something for him to repay him for his kindness yesterday. A silent vow left her lips as she promised to make it up to him.

Steeling her resolve, she walked out of her door and saw the sun peak out above the ocean. If she could just make it to Hiccup's house unseen and then back again, then no one would have to know that she was going to see him this early in the morning. She wasn't some love-sick girl who snuck into her man's room early in the morning just to see him, but she didn't want other Vikings to think that as well. Besides, if Gobber ever saw her going there, he would gossip about it to everybody. The man was worse than most housewives!

Plotting out her route and moving quickly from shadow to shadow, she made her way through her village without a hitch at all, that is until she saw Stoic exit his house and greet her. Astrid's first impression was that he looked worried. His brow was arched and his eyes slightly wide while his smile didn't really reach his eyes when he greeted her. She felt a little tremor of her own worry slip into her by seeing the chief like that, but answered back and asked about Hiccup. At his son's name, he seemed to look a little lost and then looked past her before finally turning pale as a ghost and stuttering a reply back to her about Hiccup being sick and how he didn't want her going to see him today.

Astrid felt a stab of guilt hit her as she remembered him fixing their door in the rain yesterday. He should have went home and just left the door alone. Now it's all her fault because she was the one that broke it and of course, he was so stupidly kind that he just HAD to fix it before it affected her family. Idiot! She was a Viking! A little cold and dampness wouldn't kill her! Still, it was nice of him to think of her even when she treated him like she did yesterday. Great. Talk about piling the guilt on, Hiccup.

She looked back at the chief and connected the worried look from him to Hiccup. Stoic had seen Hiccup get sick before and if he looked like this, then it had to be something serious. Worry burrowed

further into her as she asked if Hiccup was going to be alright. It really didn't help when the chief finally told her what really happened. Astrid numbly shook her head in disbelief after hearing the things that Hiccup had done yesterday. Cut off his thumb!? Tried to kill himself? He felt so bad about what she said that he tried to kill himself? Guilt, sadness, utter disbelief, and worry all hit her stomach like a rock and almost made her violently sick right in front of the chief. She did that to him. She was the one that was responsible for the state he was in right now. Oh gods, she had to leave.

Stoic ran past her quickly and she turned around as well. She had to get home and fast. Astrid didn't feel like crying, instead it was more of a feeling of getting away. Her father had already soothed her once, but a crybaby she was not and she would die before doing so two days in a row. So she headed back home to get Stormfly and go for a flight. She had told Stoic that she wouldn't see Hiccup today and she wouldn't, but she needed to clear her head and go away from the village. Anything to take her mind off of what she had made Hiccup almost do. Gods, she felt so freaking useless!

One mistake, one stupid mistake and she keeps getting punished over and over for it!? Surely everyone is allowed to make at least one mistake before it gets this bad, right? So why were the gods trying to punish her so much for one little argument? Astrid argued with herself until she got back to her house. She opened the door and saw her father sitting down at the table with something in front of her seat. He looked up and motioned for her to come to the table. When she got there, he pointed at the band of leather on the table. "It was the weirdest thing this morning, waking up with that in my beard. I didn't know it was even there until this morning."

Astrid looked at her maiden band and finally took account of how she looked this morning. Her hair was disheveled and partly in her single braid, her clothes were wrinkled, she wasn't wearing her maiden band, and she didn't have her axe. Oh gods, she had met the chief like that! She turned red with embarrassment and thanked Angnir before hurrying up the stairs to fix her appearance. Although it was true that she didn't really care what she looked like, it was still important for her to maintain the image of strong and capable Astrid Hofferson, not disheveled and scatterbrained lovesick puppy.

No sooner than she had finished finally making herself presentable, she heard a knock from the door downstairs. "Oh, Chief Stoic! Nice to see you here! What can I help you with?" Her father's voice reverberated through the air.

Astrid quickly strode downstairs to see why the chief had come to her house so soon after their talk about Hiccup. Worry filled thoughts of Hiccup played through her mind, quickening her heartbeat and stride. She finally reached the bottom of her stairs and saw Stoic looking over her father's shoulder. After spotting her, he smiled. "Oh, nothing much, Angnir. I just need to talk to the lass. Hiccup's sick and I wanted to make sure I set some ground rules so that she doesn't get it as well." A rumbling belly laugh followed shortly after, making her cringe in embarrassment and slight annoyance.

Angnir sent a glance over his shoulder to Astrid and chuckled uncomfortably. "Alright. I'll be down by the docks if either of you need me." He grabbed his horned helmet and put it on as he walked

out, sending one last look of concern at his daughter. Astrid stood there, waiting for what she believed was going to be her assignments for today from the chief.

Stoic gave her a quick once over, then broke out into a huge grin before grabbing her up in a tremendous hug. Astrid had to give credit to Hiccup's durability. It felt as if the giant Viking was trying to make her head pop off with how much strength he put into his arms. Astrid couldn't think of anything but how to get air and struggled a bit before Stoic finally put her down.

A gasp of air made its way into her lungs and continued to drag more air to her as she tried to undo the damage that massive hug had done to her. Stoic started speaking and it distracted her somewhat from the pain. "I am so happy for you two! I didn't think Hiccup had it in him! Thor almighty! Now I know why you were coming to the hall so early in the morning!" He was laughing rambunctiously and it started to confuse Astrid as she finally managed to get her voice to work.

"Chief? What do you mean? Why are you so happy again?" Astrid tried to wrap her head around what he was saying, but she truly couldn't connect anything he was saying to what had happened recently. Unless, Hiccup finally told him that they got into a fight earlier. She suddenly felt sick. He was so happy because he thought that she didn't have to marry Hiccup anymore. He had annulled the contract, somehow. She should be happy, but for some reason, revulsion coursed through her instead. Before she could dwell any longer on her feelings, Stoic spoke again.

"Wellâ€¦you knowâ€¦ because you and Hiccup finally got together! I couldn't be more proud of you two! But you know, you really should have waited. What will people think if they find out? Bah! What does it matter! You just have to get away with it!" Stoic was flitting from pride to worry and back so fast it was giving Astrid a headache. He reminded her of a little child who just received a Snoggletogg present.

"Uhhâ€¦Chief. I don't understand what you're talking about. Could you explain a bit more?" Astrid had to stop this childish act from possibly the most responsible and tough man on the entire island. No one should ever be subjected to seeing Stoic act like he was right now. The village would die of collective embarrassment.

"You knowâ€¦ you and Hiccupâ€¦didâ€¦wellâ€¦THAT! But you two should be more careful! What if your father saw you walking around like you were this morning? I know you don't like to lie, lass, but it might be wise to wear your maiden band until the day of your wedding. I don't think you want Hiccup to be killed by your father for taking yourâ€¦ummâ€¦ that. But you'll be fine. If me and Valka could hide it, so can you. Unfortunately, we can't move up the wedding day. That might make Angnir realize what happened." Stoic started to trail off as Astrid finally understood what he was saying.

'Oh godsâ€¦ oh godsâ€¦' "Chief, me and Hiccup didn't doâ€¦that. Or, well, anything for that matter." Astrid tried backtracking to save her honor.

"Of COURSE you didn't." Stoic winked at her conspiratorially. "It NEVER happened. And I have NOTHING to worry about." Stoic laughed a

little more, then moved to the door. "And I am NOT looking forward to any grandchildren." He started giggling a little. The chief of the hairy hooligan tribeâ€|GIGGLING!

"No, Chief. You don't understand. We didn't do anything. At all. I mean, I almost killed him yesterday. There is no way that could have happened." Astrid made sure to say everything as truthfully as she could and make sure that he understood.

Unfortunately, trying to reason with a giggling Viking must be almost impossible, because all Stoic did was whisper to her. "Yes, just keep that up. You are very good at this! Keep up the good work and this will blow over before you know it." Then he stood to his full height and talked a bit louder than was needed. "SO STAY AWAY FROM HICCUP TODAY! HE IS VERY SICK! THANK YOU FOR ASKING ABOUT HIM, YOUNG LASS! GOOD DAY!" And with that, he winked then turned and left.

Astrid stood at her door, stuck in silence as she stared unbelievably at Stoic's retreating form. She just couldn't believe what just happened. Her thoughts had all stopped and her eyes had gotten larger as her mouth tried valiantly to hit the floor. "But I- But we- I said-" She just couldn't get enough traction to continue her defense and instead looked around and saw everyone staring at her and smiling. She turned red as the implications of what Stoic thought he knew finally sunk in. He, the Chief of the tribe, thought that her and Hiccup hadâ€| she couldn't even finish the sentence. It was literally the furthest thing from her mind up until now.

The wooden door creaked as she stepped back inside; dazed at the conversation she just had and shut the door. Everything that had happened this morning was just too much for her poor head to handle. She made three good steps, then turned to wooden post of her stairway and kicked it as hard as she could. "DAMMIT LOKI!"

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup felt like the dead. The world was too uncomfortably hot and it was very fuzzy at the moment. Sort of like a haze after sleeping too long and getting up incredibly drowsy. There was this black turtle creature that kept moving around his bed, circling and waiting for him to move. Hiccup knew that it would devour him as soon as he did, so he chose to lay still and look around his room for any sort of helpful item he could use to protect himself. His wonderful bed was the only thing that was keeping the creature from attacking him and he was thankful for that, but it was starting to get too hot for him to handle and he needed to get out of his covers. Finally finding a weapon, he made a move for it.<p>

He reached behind his head quickly and grabbed his pillow. It would certainly shield him from the beast. Then he sat up and used it like a shield against the creature. "Back! I'm warning you, this thing is dangerous!" The black turtle shuffled back a bit and then made a crooning noise as it slowly started to move closer to him. 'It must have called for reinforcements!' Hiccup thought. Looking frightfully around the room, he saw his salvation! A piece of wood floating on the ocean that covered his room floor! Gauging the distance, he decided he could make it, but when he went to stand, his left leg didn't quite touch the bed and he flopped back down. Hiccup looked down and saw his leg. 'Drats. The beast must have taken my leg! He's a smart creature, I'll give him that!' Looking worriedly around, he

spotted his prosthetic leg floating next to his bed. Glaring daggers at the turtle, he slowly reached down to get his leg, watching it intently as he finally grasped it in his hands.

Finally retreating a bit on his bed, he quickly put the prosthetic on and periodically shifted the pillow to protect him from the piercing gaze of the black turtle that was sitting on the floor, just waiting to eat him. After he got all the buckles in place and cinched tight, he stood wobbly on his bed and slowly backed away to the edge closest to the wooden desk that was floating across his bed. The creature had cocked its head curiously and made to move towards him when he gathered his courage and threw his pillow at it before turning and making a leap towards the desk. His efforts were rewarded with a resounding crack as his metal foot struck first and broke the top layer of wood. Hiccup turned around to see where the creature was when he came face to face with said beast that was now covered in feathers. "Thor! You've eaten a chicken!" He backed away again, only to find that he was up against a wall when he noticed that he was now within jumping distance of his chandelier.

Kneeling down, Hiccup sprung with a mighty leap and barely caught the edge of his chandelier as he swung to and fro in midair. It was during this time that his door opened and he saw a mountainous man and an elderly goat enter. "Son! What in Odin's name are you doing?" The mountain man said. Hiccup looked down and could not spot the black turtle anywhere.

"Quick! Get on the bed! He's underwater! Run! Before he eats you!" He cried, trying to save the others. They looked at him with confused faces before he heard a grumble come from above him. He saw the turtle creature was perched above him on the rafters. Hiccup screamed and let go of his hold as he plummeted to the ground.

The mountain man dived and caught him before he drowned and he made to thank him, but was interrupted with "By the gods, you're burning up! Gothi, his fever is getting worse!" He turned towards the elderly goat and it moved its hoof towards his head. It felt cool and refreshing against him. He groaned into the hoof as it felt incredibly good. The goat removed its hoof and began making strange signals with its arms. The mountain man's booming voice regained his attention as it continued. "Ice. Got it."

The next thing Hiccup knew, he was thrown into a coffin filled with ice and made to drink some awful liquid he was quite certain was embalming fluid. 'Gods! I'm going to be buried alive!' He started to struggle, but he felt weak. His limbs didn't respond to him and he was getting sleepy. Wearily looking around, he saw the black turtle sitting behind the mountain man and the old goat. 'They are working for the turtle!' Was his final thought as blackness consumed his vision and he thought no more.

\*\*Yeah, I know. Not as serious as you'd have liked probably. However, it is important that some of this happen. I know it looks like filler, but it's not. I plan to write more from Hiccup's perspective soon, but it's just too much fun to mess with Stoic and Gobber sometimes. I don't see many stories that actually include Gobber in them as a point of view and I thought it would be a good idea to involve him in some of the story development. Especially when it's a funny one. (I hope) That being said, this story is still a love story and I plan on writing more about Hiccup and Astrid in it. This was a

small break from the normal because let's face it, when the parents get involved, it just gets over complicated and, in this case, hilarious. Well, please review! I know that sounds overused and can be very nagging, but I really appreciate them and I absolutely love the support you guys are giving me! Thanks for everything! See you next time on POL!\*\*

## 6. Chapter 6

\*\*Alright, moving on into the next chapter all I have to say is thank you for your continued support, you guys really keep me going, and that I will try to maintain all of your expectations as fast as I can. Also, this chapter is a tad bit longer than the others. I don't know if that's a good thing or not yet, so make sure to let me know. So without further ado, please enjoy this installment of POL.\*\*

Hiccup woke up with a shiver that ran through his back and ended at his toes. After entering the waking world, two things were made extremely evident to him. One, he was extremely cold and two, he couldn't move anywhere. Opening his eyes, he tried to make sense out of everything going on around him. Everything was a bit bright and fuzzy at first, but after blinking a few times and finally getting his arms out from underneath him, he rubbed his eyes to finally clear his vision.

The first floor of his house greeted him as he looked around. Toothless was asleep by the fire across the family room. Hiccup could hear voices coming from the kitchen area, well one voice. Stoic was trying to be quiet, he knew, but that did not stop his overly robust voice from carrying. "What do you mean he can't get married? He's my heir! The entire clan needs him to marry!" Hiccup was a little disoriented and confused after hearing that. He slipped on whatever surface he was on and slid underneath ice cold water.

He spluttered and flailed about, trying to break the water when two massive hands grabbed him around the arms and lifted him above the freezing pool. Stoic's face was full of worry as he put his son on the ground next to Toothless, who had risen and formed a suitable backrest for him. A wool blanket was thrown around him quickly and he looked around, teeth chattering, trying to figure everything out. Stoic bent down on one knee to look him over and finally addressed him. "Son, are you alright? Are you feeling any better?" Toothless crooned behind him in concern.

Hiccup took account of himself for a moment. He was shivering with cold, he had a pretty bad headache, his stomach felt extremely empty, his nose was stopped up, and he felt a bit nauseous. "What happened? Why do I feel so wrong?" Doing a quick double take, he noticed that the icy water was in fact a tub full of ice that he had constructed for his dad a long time ago. He tried to wrack his brain to explain why he felt like he did, but continued to come up with nothing.

Stoic finally cleared his throat and it got Hiccup's attention. He started explaining as Gothi came over to poke, prod, and observe his reactions. "Son, you've been sick for the past couple of days. We found you hanging from the chandelier, running from Toothless. Gothi and I have been trying to keep your fever down for a while now, but

it just wouldn't break until we threw you into some ice water. Even then, it would come back soon after you got out. Gothi says that you caught a cold and a temperature from staying outside in the rain for too long, but that wasn't the main reason it was so bad. She said that your Viking spirit has weakened." Gothi's head poked up in between Stoic and Hiccup's stares and looked into his eyes. Sagely nodding, she began to leave, but smacked Stoic in the back with her staff as if to say that their conversation was not over. Stoic looked helplessly at Hiccup then back to Gothi. He sighed and gently patted Hiccup on the shoulder. "Hold on, son. I have to talk to Gothi for a bit." And with that, he got up and left.

Toothless took that moment to wrap his tail around Hiccup and warble next to him, questioning his rider. "Yeah, bud. I'm good, I think. Just sick." He got a lick in the face for his troubles and a Toothless trademark smile. Hiccup went to smile back, but sneezed as soon as he opened his mouth. Snot flew across Toothless's face and the poor dragon jumped like he'd been shot and shook his head to and fro as fast as he could, slinging mucus all over the room while Hiccup landed with a thud on the floor after Toothless got up to clean his face off. Hiccup tried to apologize as much as he could, but Toothless was moving across the room, wiping at his head with his forepaw. "Bud, I am so sorry! I didn't mean to-" Another sneeze wracked his body and covered his own hands in slime. "Ugh. That is gross!"

Stoic came rushing in to find Toothless sticking his head into the fire pit and Hiccup covered in dragon spit and snot. "What in Odin's name happened? I leave you alone for two seconds and this happens!" Stoic grabbed another blanket from a chair and threw it at Hiccup while trying to calm down an exasperated Night Fury. After Toothless had sulked off up into Hiccup's room upstairs, Stoic went to the kitchen and grabbed the medicine that Gothi left for Hiccup. When he finally made his way back to the now somewhat clean Hiccup, he knelt down in front of his son and continued from earlier. "Here, drink this, son. Gothi said that your spirit was what is ailing you right now. Now, no Haddock has ever lost a fight because of some spirit. So, out with it, son. Tell me what is bothering with you." Hiccup drank the absolutely disgusting concoction and almost threw up right there.

Their relationship as father and son had always been a strained one. Hiccup and Stoic just couldn't talk, even when they wanted to. Stoic was brash, rough, and stubborn. Whereas Hiccup was just as stubborn, he tended to be hesitant, careful, and instantaneous with his thoughts. There was no better example as to how hard it was to connect to one another than now. After Stoic had basically demanded that Hiccup tell him what was wrong with him and basically saying 'get over it' at the same time, Hiccup felt like a terrible terror facing down the queen dragon.

He tried to explain, he really did, but it wound up sounding like "I-uh-well, you knowâ€¦ the thing isâ€¦" and he just couldn't get the real reason that he was distressed to voice itself. What did he tell him? 'Hey dad, I don't want to marry Astrid! Well, I do, but not yet. So can we wait a few more years before we actually tie the knot?' Stoic wasn't known for his patience. Or how about 'Well, dad, I'm so glad you asked. Me and Astrid just got into this huge fight and I'm pretty sure I'm going to be killed the next time I see her. So I'm sorry, but the wedding is basically called off. And you might want to



find another heirâ€| ' Yeah, he could see THAT going over well. So Hiccup chose the easiest thing he could think of. "Errâ€| You see, dad, it's dragon training stuff. I mean, Toothless and the rest of the dragons are getting fatter and I'm concerned about their health." It was a total lie and absolutely unrelated to how he actually felt, so he was sure that his dad would understand.

Stoic broke out into a massive smile. "That's my boy! Already thinking of the village! Don't worry about it so much, I'll teach you a few chiefting tricks and this will all work out fine. Just wait until you're old enough for me to train you properly to be chief! You'll be the best one that ever leads this clan!" Stoic lunged at the already frail boy and enveloped him in one of his massive hugs that might have broken a few ribs. Hiccup groaned in discomfort, but didn't stop his father from hugging him. Affection like this was something new that he had yet to get used to. He wasn't going to pass up an opportunity to be close to his father, even if it was extremely painful. Still, he couldn't stop a small pain of guilt at deceiving his dad.

After the bear hug had ended, Stoic carried Hiccup up to his room and laid him down on the bed. "Get some rest, son. Gothi said it wouldn't take long for the medicine to help you, but it'll make you sleepy. I'll take care of Toothless and make sure he gets his exercise." He took a quick look at the still peeved dragon and then turned back to Hiccup and tried to whisper "You're right, he IS looking a bit plump. I'll make sure that he eats a bit less to help out." Emphasis on tried. Toothless's head rose up and his mouth dropped at what he undoubtedly just heard. Hiccup cringed and then watched his father leave, only to see Toothless looking at him with a look of betrayal on his face.

"Toothless! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! You know how I am with dad! He wouldn't understand the truth if I told him! I had to come up with something! Please, bud. You got to believe me!" Hiccup begged his dragon, but Toothless just curled up and turned his back on him. "Great. Now Astrid AND you are mad at me. My life just keeps getting better!" Hiccup flopped back on his bed and turned to look at his desk. "That's odd. Why is my desk broken?" He tried to think on it more, but drowsiness hit him hard and he barely had time to roll over before sleep took him again.

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><p>It seemed that this week was out to kill her. Astrid had been wrenched from all forms of normalcy in her life in a matter of less than four days. The first two were the most trying for her as the information that was given to her struck her completely off guard and continued to bombard her with difficult realities that she wasn't ready to face yet.<p>

However, that wasn't the worst part. No, her whip-like emotions continued to thrash to and fro so fast that it made her feel psychotic. At first, she hated the mere thought of being married and further incensed when she found out that she was being married without her consent and behind her back. There was a slight comfort in knowing that she was being married to Hiccup instead of some dolt that she had never heard or seen before. Yet, her anger did not abate until later that day when she broke down in front of her father, something that she is still ashamed of at the moment. Sadness was the

pervading emotion that struck her after that. She had thought only of herself the entire time and did not give a single mite of attention to how Hiccup must feel about all of it. Then to top all of that off, she went and crushed the poor boy and didn't realize it until her personal breakdown. After that, she tried to fix the problem and found out that she had almost driven Hiccup to suicide.

The embarrassment that the chief forced on her after he came to her house left her flinging her axe against trees for hours until she got her blazing ears under control. Unfortunately, it had taken most of the day to fly out there and she had eventually cut down the tree that she was throwing the axe at. When it came time to get back to the village, night had fallen without her realizing it. She finally dragged herself up to her bedroom and fell over her bed.

It was the next day that she absolutely hated with a passion. Rain poured down from above in droves, but that didn't seem to stop everyone from coming outside to look at her. It seemed that everyone continued to give her these knowing looks. Like they understood exactly what her and the chief talked about. No matter where she walked in the village, she couldn't escape their stares of happiness and contentment that permeated from their smug little faces. She was quite proud of herself for not laying a single one of them out—that was until Snotlout had the nerve to walk up to her, call her babe, and then wink at her in broad daylight. She lost it. The next thing she knew, red suffused her eyesight and Snotlout was the only clear thing in front of her. She slammed her fist into his face and then kicked him into the nearest wall, which just so happened to be the forge. After a lot of clanging and clattering, with a few choice curses from Gobber, Snotlout stood up and tried to run away, but she tackled him to the ground before he could make good his escape. She was in the middle of crashing Snotlout's face into the cobblestone when Gobber picked her up with his tongs and carried her away from the now unconscious boy. Thrashing back and forth, she tried to escape, but was suddenly weightless before she crashed down into a tub of cold water. Her vision returned and she was shocked out of her rage by a voice that simply said, "Calm yourself, Astrid. Sit in there for a bit and cool off."

Finally realizing what she had just done, she slumped underwater and tried to hide her shame. She had attacked a fellow Viking in broad daylight and beat him within an inch of his life. The only thing that kept her from truly regretting her actions was that it was Snotlout and out of all the people she could have attacked, he probably deserved it the most. After coming up for air, she saw Gobber sitting down on the bench close to the smithy, giving her the 'explain yourself' look. She tried her level best to act normal about it and simply replied, "He called me babe. I'm nobody's 'babe'."

Gobber nodded his head sagely and then got up to enter his forge like it was nothing. It probably was nothing, after all. She beat up Snotlout all the time, she thought. She dragged herself out of the tub of water and tried to make it back to her house. It didn't matter that she was already soaked from the rain outside or the sudden bath.

On her way back, she met the twins who smiled at her and she swore gave her leering glances. So of course she had to jump them and put them in their places. After walking away, dusting her hands from all the imaginary dirt that had gathered there, she walked not two houses

down and was met by the thoroughly engrossed Fishlegs carrying two large baskets of fish. He must have seen her, she had thought, because he stopped in the middle of the pathway and turned to run away from her. He obviously had done something wrong to her and was running away like a coward because of his guilt. So she decided to cure him of his cowardice and make him face her instead. She ran after him and grabbed the back of his tunic before throwing him on the ground and turning to look at the overly frightened boy. The only thing that stopped her fist was because he cringed a lot like Hiccup did right before she usually hit him. In that split second, she felt her anger leave her and she turned to go back to her house, leaving a mortified but thankful Fishlegs laying in a puddle of suspiciously yellow color.

Astrid had ran up to her room to change first, then moved to the cellar to feed Stormfly. She had to butter the dragon up a little before she could convince her to fly her discreetly over to Hiccup's house to check on him, her original intention when she left earlier this morning. Finally convincing her preening partner to take her over there, she gathered her woolen cloak and took off into the air, flying as stealthily as she could. Surprisingly, it seemed that everyone had only come out earlier in the day to see her, because hardly anyone was outside when she made her flight. When she got to the roof of Hiccup's house, she landed softly next to the dragon door and crept inside. She was met with the happy gaze of Toothless as soon as she closed the door behind her. His gummy smile made her want to smile back at him, but worry gnawed at her stomach now that she was so close to finally seeing the root of all her current troubles. The floor felt slippery as she dropped down to it and noticed that Toothless seemed a little wet. It was sort of odd, seeing as she was sure he hadn't been outside today, she would have noticed him. She put her hand to his snout and almost pulled back in shock, he was freezing cold! Dragons are normally exceptionally warm, or in Hookfang's case, extremely hot. So she now shifted her concern to the shivering reptile in front of her. Looking around, she saw that Hiccup was not in his bed, so she hurried over to it and took the covers off of it and wrapped Toothless as best she could in it.

"What is wrong with you, Toothless? Use your fire to warm yourself! Hiccup would go crazy if he saw you like this." After drying the dragon off, she went to move him over to his own rock, but he pushed her towards the stairs instead and whined at her. Taking her cue, she started down the stairs with the freezing night fury behind her. When she adjusted to the brightness of the room, she noticed that Hiccup was asleep inside some sort of metal bowl. Did he fall out doing laundry? She made her way over to him and saw that, no, he was in fact mostly submerged in a large mass of ice water. He was shivering, but his face was a bright red. Astrid lifted her hand to his head and found out that he was burning with fever. But to resort to this drastic of a measure, it must have been bad.

Toothless shirked off the bedcovers and jumped into the ice water, curling around his rider, crooning in worry. That was why he was freezing. He was keeping Hiccup from turning into a block of ice. Astrid pulled up a chair and pulled Hiccup by his tunic over to the side of the tub. She took his freezing hair and moved it out of the way of his eyes. They were still closed, but he was muttering something repeatedly under his breath, like a mantra in a dream or something. She leaned down closer to hear, but was only able to

understand some of his ramblings. "..stridâ€|sorry ..strid..sorry..astridâ€|sorryâ€|" was as much as she could pick up. Her chest hurt a little like she had been kicked there by her father during a sparring match. Like earlier today, she seemed to lose control of herself and pulled Hiccup's head into a hug.

"Idiot." Was the only thing that left her mouth as she continued to hold him a few minutes longer. She would have stayed with him for as long as possible, if she hadn't heard thumping footsteps coming from somewhere else in the house. Releasing Hiccup, she gently set his head down on the edge of the tub and made to get up. However, a quick flash of inspiration struck her and she acted on it before she could chicken out. She craned her head over his and kissed him on the forehead before she whispered "For health." And then quietly ran up the stairs and out of the dragon door to her waiting Nadder. Her flush of embarrassment had returned, but she didn't plan on getting rid of it this time. It was a badge of her courage and she planned on wearing it until it faded away.

A few minutes of stealth flying back home and she had finally gotten back to her room in one piece and no one even knew that she was gone. Dang she was good! That is, until she went downstairs and saw her father giving her the same blasted look that the entire populace of Berk seemed to sport today. "Evening, Astrid. What have you been up to today?" She strolled down the stairs like she always did and shrugged her shoulders like it was like every other day. "Oh. So you didn't go flying off to see that Hiccup boy?" He looked at her with a knowing smile. Oh how she hated him right now.

She whirled on him in anger, but before she could get a word out, he held up both of his hands as if to say he was sorry. "It's fine. You two will be wed after the storm passes. It should let up soon, if Gothi's predictions are right. I just wanted to spend the day with you while I had the chance. After you are off and married, you will have to live in the Haddock hall and I won't get to see you as much. So what do you say we eat together as a family and then go out back to spar a little?" That man knew exactly how to weasel his way out of a fight, that's for sure.

Astrid nodded her head yes, but then realized what he had just said. She was getting married soon. Like really soon! She had no more time to think of ways to get out of it. Yes, she felt a bit better about it than she did before, but she was not ready for something as permanent as marriage. Everyone expected her to just be alright with this? She cast another hate filled stare at her father and sat down to shovel their dinner into her mouth as quick as possible. Oh, he was going to get the crap beat out of him today.

Angnir settled himself to eat at a reasonable pace and tried to make some conversation. "I got to see Hiccup today. Gothi was there and told me that we shouldn't worry too much. He looks worse than he is. But I have to wonder, do you think he got sick on purpose?" He stopped to bite down on his mutton before looking at Astrid pointedly.

Astrid tore into her meat with a vengeance, but replied anyway. "What do you think? We don't exactly have a choice about getting married, so of course we are going to try to stop it. So in a way, this is all your fault that he's sick, isn't it?" She was trying to make him feel bad about everything. It was all his fault that this was all

happening. He should feel as bad as she did, no, worse than she did!

A pained look crossed his face before he looked at her. "Astrid, it is the Viking way. I had to do this and you know it. Both of you are of marrying age and I thought that it would be best to set your future as bright as possible. When he becomes chief, you'll never want for anything."

"No, what I WANT is not to get married! I don't want to be sold off to the chief for a future that you decided for me!" Anger was starting to build behind her words and she did her best to save it for the inevitable match afterwards.

"Do you think that I wanted to marry your mother at first?" The question gave her pause. She never thought about her own parent's arranged marriage. "I was just as opposed to it as you are to yours right now. Every Viking usually is. But you saw how much I loved her. I would not change a single thing about our marriage even to this day. I learned to love her AFTER I married her. You and Hiccup at least are starting to learn this before your own." Astrid was silent for a couple of moments before she saw the look her father gave her. The pillar of strength that her father had always seemed to crack slightly as unshed tears welled up in his beady eyes. "I loved your mother so very much, Astrid. I want so very much for her to be here to see you married. But she can't be. I know I'm not the best parent that you could have, but I'm doing everything I can to take care of you. When the other tribes come in this season, they might demand that Hiccup marry someone else. I'm not blind, I see how you two act around each other. Would you rather see him married to a woman he doesn't like? Or would you rather go and live on a different island and marry another family over there, never to see him again? Tell me what you want, Astrid." He didn't cry, but his words cracked a little here and there.

Astrid felt like dirt. Her own father had finally made her understand why he had chosen Hiccup for her to marry AND why it had to be so soon. She let the words sink in and rose from the table slowly before moving over to her father. She punched him extremely hard in the arm "That's for not talking to me about it before you went and signed the contract." Angnir winced at her punch and went to speak, but was engulfed in a hug from his daughter. "And this is for everything else."

He hugged her back with a tender softness that he reserved just for her. "Careful, girl. All this hugging might make me think you're going soft."

She snickered and let go of him before grabbing her axe that had suspiciously made its way onto the wall next to the stairway. "Let me show you just how \_soft\_ I've gotten. That is, if you think you have the guts to try and take me on." Then she walked towards the backdoor, not waiting on Angnir to finish his meal.

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><p>Hiccup woke up the next morning and felt a whole lot better. Whatever Gothi had given him, it had truly worked wonders. He was never a morning person, but he felt like he had a ton of energy as he sat up in his bed and started to buckle on his prosthetic. The sound

of silence assaulted his ears after he was finished and he wondered why. Toothless was gone, but he expected as much. After all, his best friend was probably going to sulk for a while longer before he could apologize to him. Still, it confused Hiccup. Usually when it rained, Toothless liked to stay inside. Listening intently, he didn't hear the sound of rain and came to the conclusion that it must have stopped.<p>

He shrugged and made his way down to the kitchen to grab something to carry with him today. Since flying was out of the question today, he thought he would work a little at the forge and then head out into the forest to clear his head a bit. After all, with all this marriage business, his mind could barely stay focused enough as it was. Good thing he had until the storm sto- "Oh gods. It stopped raining." He paled instantly and brought his hands up to his head in fear. It was over. All that time, wasted. Why did his pathetically weak body have to take so long to heal? Everything he could have done to postpone it or stop it before it got to this point was now a moot point. Panic settled into the pit of his stomach and he felt the need to vomit. Unfortunately, he had nothing to expunge, so it was just painful dry heaves that wracked his body.

After a while, the pain subsided and Hiccup sat down at the table, holding his head in his hands. "Calm down. Calm down. Nothing you can do about it now. Just calm down." He did his best to regain control over his rapidly beating heart and heaving breaths. Shortly after, he had regained a modicum of normality and took deep calming breaths to relax himself. "Alright, so what can I do now?" Hiccup started to think of anything and everything he could do to help, but was interrupted by footsteps falling heavily behind him.

Stoic walked into the kitchen and appraised Hiccup. Relief flooded across his face and Hiccup thought that he saw a glimmer of happiness streak across his eyes as well. "Morning, son! Your beast put up a little bit of a fight, but he eventually listened to me and only ate half of the barrel of fish that I put out for him. But he's in a foul mood now, so I'd steer clear of him for a bit."

Hiccup could easily imagine the grief he'd be getting for this later from his best bud, but shut it out of his mind. Maybe it was his desperation or maybe it was him finally growing a backbone, but he mustered the courage he needed and asked his father an important favor. "Dad, listen, I was hoping you would do me a favor. You see, I don't think it's such a good idea to have a wedding this soon after the storm. You know, mud and all that. Besides, I think the storm is a message from the gods saying that I probably shouldn't get married at all just yet. So, how about we postpone the wedding, say a couple years or so?" Hiccup knew it was a long shot, but he had to try.

Stoic looked pensive for a moment and then brightened quickly. "Good idea, Hiccup! Don't want your bride's dress to get all muddied, right? The wedding of the future chief should be an important event. So we have to prepare properly for it! I'll get the whole village to help decorate the great hall and we'll start with our end of the preparations immediately! I just have to ask Angnir what he thinks this morning and then we'll postpone it until everything is ready! Good thinking son! I'm sure Astrid will be even happier with you now. Not that she isn't happy enough now, eh son?" Stoic wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, but Hiccup just sat there in confusion.

"What are you talking about, dad? Preparations? What preparations? I haven't even prepared my mind for something like this! You think I can prepare anything else?" Hiccup was losing ground fast. "And what do you mean, talk it over with Mr. Hofferson? I thought you had chiefing duties today." Hiccup was trying to buy time to think of something else.

"Aye, I do. But the Hoffersons will be joining us this morning for breakfast in the great hall! We had originally planned on marrying you two off this evening and wanted to exchange the gifts this morning." Stoic finished happily.

Hiccup sat there, fingers digging into the tabletop and felt all of his blood fade from his face. He was going to die today. No reconciliation with Toothless, no making things better with Astrid. She was going to behead him today, end of story. "Errâ€¦ dad. That might not be a good idea. Maybe I should, I don't know, leave for a different island first? And what gifts? I didn't get any gifts!"

Stoic belly laughed. "Aye, you didn't. I took care of that for you. I already paid the bride price while you were sleeping with fever. Cost me five yaks, three shields, two hammers, and a promise that you would help Angnir pick out a dragon of his very own as soon as possible. Think you could do that today?"

Hiccup felt like hitting his head on the tableâ€¦ extremely hard. His father was obviously trying to help his son, but in reality, only made things much worse. What could he say to get out of this? What could he do to make this all go away? For the first time in his life, he was drawing a blank. He had no ideas, no clever rouse or tactic that he could implement. He felt exactly like his old namesake, useless. He groaned and let his head hit the table with a thud.

There was a knock at the door and Stoic got up to answer it. Hiccup was too lost in his world to even register who it was at the moment. His world was ending. His best friend was mad at him, the girl he liked probably hated his guts right now, and he couldn't do a thing about either one. It was only when his back erupted in pain that he noticed that said guest was patting him on the back. He stood up from his seat, both to stop the patting and to see who had come to visit this early in the morning. Angnir Hofferson stood right beside him with a sheepish grin on his face. "Good morning, Hiccup!" He was jovial, but looked a little bit stressed himself. He had bruises over his arms, a swollen eye, and a few scratches here and there all over him.

"Good morning, Mr. Hofferson." Hiccup would normally be extremely pleased with himself for not stuttering, but his mood kept him from thinking such thoughts and instead, seemed resigned to accept whatever fate had in store for him.

"I was just talking to your father and I am very happy that you chose to try and do all the traditional preparations for the wedding! Trying to keep the mud off of my girl's wedding dress and going the extra mile to make it extra special! My boy, you are a truly a great man!" And with that, Hiccup was engulfed in another bone crushing hug, albeit slightly less encompassing as his father's. He tried his

best to breathe, but found that both men had exceptionally strong grips. After Angnir put him down, he chuckled nervously. "But I'm afraid I have a bit of bad news. I can't seem to find Astrid anywhere. She took her dragon and ran off somewhere. She'll come back, I know, but she's probably going to be gone for the rest of the day. She was sort of under the impression that she was marrying you today and I think she got cold feet. No worries, though! After I tell her what you want to do, she'll come running back!"

Stoic listened with interest before deciding to butt in a little. "You know, Angnir, since the wedding is being postponed for a little while, why don't you have Hiccup help you pick out a dragon today? To finish out the bride price."

Angnir looked thoughtful, but nodded shortly after. "Sounds good. I was hoping to spend some time with my future son-in-law!" Angnir patted Hiccup on the shoulder, which almost sent him to the ground, and then turned to Hiccup. "That is, if you're up for it. I know that you are still on the mend."

Hiccup wanted so bad to say that he was still sick and couldn't go. Spending the day with Astrid's father was going to be all kinds of dangerous, but before he could open his mouth to decline, his father had to open his mouth. "He's feeling much better! Healthy as a yak! He's been cooped up in his room for two days now, he needs the fresh air. Isn't that right, son?" Hiccup never thought about hating his father. It had simply never crossed his mind. After all the years of trying to earn his acceptance and approval, he wanted the exact opposite of hatred to be what he felt for his father. However, at that exact moment, he dearly hated his father and didn't feel sorry about it at all.

"Y-Yeah, dad. That sounds good to me." Hiccup was gritting his teeth and trying to sound excited, but sarcasm had always found a way to leak out of his voice and it didn't stop now.

"Great! Let's go eat and then we'll head out together!" Angnir sounded excited. He put his hand on Hiccup's back and walked him out of the house in a hurry. "We better get there before everyone else does. They still think that the wedding is happening today, so there won't be much leftovers." Hiccup sighed and walked like he was a man condemned to die.

The villagers all seemed to have made their way to the great hall and the village seemed empty. When they arrived, Hiccup followed his father to a table and waited. Breakfast seemed to go over without a hitch. Everyone seemed a little disappointed that there wasn't going to be a wedding, but rejoiced soon after when Stoic told them that Hiccup wanted to have a proper wedding and was asking everyone to pitch in to make it a grand event. Hiccup himself went completely red from embarrassment and refused to look up from his fish after that. Angnir smiled and patted him on the back regardless, though.

The man frightened Hiccup. He was smart AND strong. In Berk, you didn't see many people with those traits. Still, he wasn't as afraid of him as he was Astrid. A slight shiver went down his spine at the thought of her. He would be lying if he said that he didn't have mixed emotions about her right now. He desperately wanted to see her, but at the same time wanted to avoid her at all costs. It is confusing how she made him feel all the time. His thoughts were



ripped away from him by Angnir standing up and offering Hiccup a hand up as well. "Well, lad. Think we should get going?"

Hiccup nodded and stood on wobbly legs. "Yes, sir." He was going to be as polite and cordial as possible to this man. Hopefully that would be enough to keep him out of trouble until Astrid killed him. They both started to move towards the dragon training ring when Angnir took his shoulder and pointed towards the forest.

"Actually, Hiccup. I was hoping we could go to the forest to find one. I don't think I get along too well with any of them down there. Too many bad memories of my own training are down there, if you know what I mean." Hiccup looked at Angnir and slowly nodded. He remembered his own time down there and how he was expected to kill one at the end. He guessed it didn't end as peacefully in Angnir's generation that it did in his.

After they made it a ways into the forest, Angnir again tapped Hiccup on the shoulder and pointed to a dead tree on the ground. "Let's rest a bit over there. One of my old injuries is acting up." He didn't really wait for a response and lumbered over to the tree. Hiccup followed him and thought he heard a Nadder, but put it out of his head. They'd find another one soon. Angnir needed to be rested enough to try and tame a wild dragon before they attempted to catch one.

As Hiccup went to sit down, Angnir turned to him. "Hiccup, you are a very bright lad and I know that you understand certain things better than most. That being said, I want to have a talk with you. I think I'd like to get to know the person that Astrid will be married to rather than the name everyone keeps telling me." Hiccup sort of tripped a little over his feet as he was descending and missed his intended target, instead landing on the ground in front of the downed tree.

"Uhhâ€¦ Ok, sir. Whatever you say." Hiccup answered wearily. Great. This was a conversation he was not looking forward to. This past week just had it out for him, apparently. Still, Hiccup wouldn't shake something as important as this off. He intended to follow through with whatever Angnir asked him. It was his only option now.

"Alright, now that's the first thing. None of that 'sir' business. Call me Angnir or dad. After all, that's what I'll be to you after you marry my daughter. Now, I know that having this conversation isn't exactly something you're probably looking forward to. When I first sat down and talked to my father-in-law, it was with fists instead of words. And he was a big man. However, I need you to take this seriously and answer truthfully. I promise to do the same. Shake on it?" Angnir held out his hand and Hiccup gulped before taking it in his own, shaking once in affirmation. "Good. So here's how it's going to go, I ask you a question, you ask me. When we're done, we'll get up and head back." Angnir smirked a little before he settled down a bit to get more comfortable.

"Get back? Wasn't I supposed to help you get yourself a dragon?" Hiccup was a little confused for a moment. Until he realized what Angnir had done. He'd wasted his first question. Drats, this man was smart.

"When I get a dragon, it will be with the help of my entire family.

My daughter AND my son. I can wait until then. The bride price will still be paid. Now, my first question. Do you love my daughter?" Angnir looked intently at Hiccup.

Hiccup squirmed a bit under his scrutiny. He wasn't used to this. His father gruffly demanded a certain answer and usually supplied him with the proper response. Angnir seemed to genuinely want to know what he thought. The truth had been promised to Angnir and Hiccup couldn't lie, but he felt slightly odd that he could talk better with a man who was much more likely to kill him than his father. With a calming sigh, Hiccup looked up at Angnir and held his eye before he answered with just as much certainty as he could muster. "Yes. Why did you agree to have me and Astrid married?"

Angnir looked satisfied with his answer and sat back a little. "In truth, the main reason I chose to accept your father's proposal was because I saw between you two a chance for something much greater than a strong child to come of your union. Happiness and love are two things that most Vikings give up on when it comes to marriage. I was lucky enough to have that with my wife while she was still alive. I want Astrid to have the same thing I did. When you two are married, will you allow Astrid to continue to fight as she does now?" Angnir looked menacingly at Hiccup, as if to intimidate him into answering the question. However, the swollen eye and bruised arms reduced its effectâ€|slightly.

An audible gulp was the first thing that Hiccup let Angnir hear, then thought for a moment. "I don't think I could stop her if I tried. Astrid is Astrid. She will do what she wants, when she wants. I can't take that from her. It's bad enough that she has to marry me, I won't take her freedom from her. Besides, she is a much better fighter than myself. Is there any way I can convince you to postpone the wedding a few years?" Hiccup was an open book, he didn't care how desperate he sounded. He had to try and keep his word with Astrid.

Angnir looked at Hiccup strangely, then took a deep breath. "I wanted to postpone the wedding a while longer, but I can't anymore. You have to understand, Hiccup. When the delegations from the other tribes get here, they won't care if you have a betrothed or not. They will threaten war or dissolution of important trade routes to marry one of their women off to the next chief of Berk. If we postpone this wedding, you'll be married to someone other than Astrid. When you talk about yourself and being together with Astrid, you sound like you discredit yourself. Why is that?"

All the negative emotions that fed Hiccup all week began to bubble to the surface. He knew he had to answer truthfully, but where to start? There were so many things that he had to say. Taking a deep breath, he started with the most obvious. "There are so many reasons why I don't deserve to be with her that I couldn't begin to name them all. The most prominent, I guess, is that I'm not really Viking enough for her. I can't give her what she wants. Look at me! I can't lift an axe, swing a mace, be a sparring partner, hunt by myself, and I don't even have all my limbs! What kind of self-respecting Viking am I?" Too late, Hiccup realized that he had unleashed all his frustrations out on Angnir and asked a question as well.

The older man sat on the log and let everything that Hiccup said sink in. Then, he stood up and moved over to Hiccup. "Hiccup, look at me. Never think that you are not a truly amazing Viking. You asked me

what kind of Viking you were, well the truth is, you're one of a kind. Name one Viking hero who was exactly like every other Viking around him. What you see as weaknesses are instead your strengths. You don't have to lift an axe or swing a mace. I've seen you fight before, lad. You don't fight with these." Angnir lifted his hands and grabbed Hiccup's arms gently. "You fight with this." He lifted his left hand and touched Hiccup's head. "And this" His right hand came to rest over Hiccup's heart. "And if you care about my daughter half as passionately as you fight, then I have no worries leaving her in your care. Great things have happened because of you and they will continue to happen in years to come. Now, I have one last question before I let you go back to the village. Do you want to learn how to fight?" Angnir smiled at the end, standing close to Hiccup with both his hands on his hips.

That last question caught Hiccup off guard. When Angnir answered his rushed and not thought out question, he was amazed at what Angnir thought of him. He was still trying to process everything that was said to him by the man when a totally unexpected question came out of the blue and snapped him from his reverie. "Learn how to fight? I can't! Dad tried to teach me, but he said I have no talent for it and that I should stick to Smithing." Hiccup felt a little uneasy unearthing all these truths right in front of Astrid's dad, but for some reason, the man was able to drag this stuff out of him.

"Maybe you just didn't have the right teacher. Astrid was horrible when I first started teaching her, but now look how good she is." He pointed to his face. "I can't have my future son-in-law be totally defenseless, can I? So what do you say? Are you willing to let me knock you around a bit until you can defend yourself?" Angnir smiled menacingly and Hiccup thought for a moment how Astrid gets her intimidating tendencies from her father.

"Uh.. well.. If you think it'll helpâ€¦ I guess I could try. When do we start?" Hiccup felt apprehensive, but also a little excited. He didn't relish the idea of hurting someone, but he didn't exactly shy away from the idea of defending himself.

"It won't be any time soon. You're going to have your plate full for the next week or so." Angnir chuckled a little. "But that's the end of our conversation, go on back to the village, lad. I have to go hunting for supper anyways. I'm sure I'll see you soon." And with that, Hiccup was dismissed.

It was all so surreal for Hiccup, something that he honestly didn't think he'd be doing at all. Getting torn limb from limb by an overprotective father that is worried about his daughter marrying him, yes. But approval? He'd never really had a lot of it growing up and it was something he wasn't used to accepting just yet. So he walked back home in a daze, listing left and right as he tried to make sense of everything that happened so far.

**\*\*I hope that you enjoyed this chapter! If you did, please review! I love seeing the little emails in my inbox saying that you have reviewed my story! Everyone has an opinion and I desperately want to hear yours. So please voice it! Thanks again for everything! See you in the next installment of POL!\*\***

**\*\*Sort of hit a writer's block with this next chapter. That and I rewrote this sucker close to twelve times. I hope that this chapter is more interesting and praiseworthy than the last one! Please enjoy!\*\***

Astrid awoke to the reverberating sound of Stormfly's relaxed breathing. The dragon's steady intake and exhale slowly bringing her to the waking world with a contented feeling. Unfortunately, it didn't last long. As the fog of sleep slowly abated, memories of the previous day and week bombarded her mind. Panic seized her heart with a sharp grasp and held it as it beat painfully fast. Astrid tried her best to remain calm, but one thought continued to haunt her. I'm getting married today. It had stopped storming the day before, but since Hiccup was sick, the wedding didn't occur.

Vikings are impatient by nature and quickly go about completing unfinished business. If they had to prop Hiccup up on a stool, they would. She had to get out. Even though her talk with her father had made her understand, it did not make her feel at all ready for today. Her panic must have woke Stormfly, because the next thing that Astrid knew, she was being wrapped closer by her dragon's tail and crooned at in worry. Warmth flooded her chest and she didn't resist the urge to hug her dragon and scratch her in appreciation. "At least I'm comfortable being with you for the rest of my life, girl." Stormfly squawked happily at the attention and stood up, lifting Astrid as well.

"I'm not ready to meet anyone today, so let's go fly for a while, ok?" Astrid grabbed her spare saddle, just for emergencies or so she had told Hiccup when she asked him to make her an extra, and put it on Stormfly before taking off through the dragon door and into the air. Flying always seemed to brighten her mood and this morning was no exception. She forgot about her troubles for a minute or two as the world sped up underneath her and became a blur. The wind ripped all other thoughts away with its icy bite and left nothing but numb excitement. Stormfly flew her over to the woods and circled around a nearby lake.

"Sorry girl, I didn't feed you this morning. Let's land for a bit and you can get some fish there." Astrid pointed at the lake below and Stormfly didn't hesitate. She went into a dive and then snapped her wings open just as the water was about to meet them, gliding over to its edge. Astrid took her saddle off Stormfly and sat down, letting her dragon have her breakfast alone. Her body thrummed with the rush of flying and her mind buzzed with excitement. She loved this feeling. Sometimes, when she practiced with her axe, she was able to achieve a feeling similar to this one, but not as intense.

Finally, her mind slowed down enough for the stray thoughts she had cast aside wiggled their way into her awareness. She understood that every woman had to eventually get married or become a shield maiden. However, to be honest, she was hoping more towards the latter at the moment. She just didn't feel like it was the right time to choose between the two paths she had in front of her. It made perfect sense to be married to the future chief from a political and financial standpoint, but it made her feel like she was using Hiccup. They were friends or possibly more than that. She felt like she was cheating him if she approached the wedding like that. Astrid Hofferson didn't need to use someone else to get her own glory and achievements! She

fought bravely with the other Vikings to make her own name and legend.

Astrid shook her head angrily. She needed a fight. Something to cool her down and give her that thrill that even surpassed flying. Then, maybe she could walk into this marriage thing with her head held high. Confidence born of martial skill that she herself had won would surely make her feel more self-assured. A stray thought blinked across her mind and she almost missed it, but she clung to it with the tenacity of a drowning Viking clinging to a floating piece of wood. There was a way to do both! She could do this! Hurriedly standing, she called Stormfly over, who had yet to finish her meal, and saddled her again for another quick flight. "Sorry girl, but this can't wait!" Astrid jumped into her seat and then took off with renewed determination, grinning into the wind as she headed back to her house.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup was thoroughly and absolutely confused. On his way back to the village, he tried his best to figure out what had just happened with Astrid's father, but was so far unsuccessful. People don't praise him for being him. Sure, they cheer at what he did and anything related to dragons, but that was about it. He was still the same Hiccup that screwed over the village more than he helped it when he did it without Toothless to help him. Granted, he had gotten better, but he had found his best friend that made sure he succeeded. Out of all the things that Hiccup had accomplished, becoming friends with Toothless would still remain on top.<p>

Speaking of which, he had to mend their somewhat awkward rift that he had inadvertently caused. Spotting dragon nip to his right, he went about gathering as much as he could hold. The winter would be coming soon and it was wise to stock up on as much as he could while he had the chance. After spending some time collecting he finally stood and continued on towards Berk. He would have to work with Toothless first. After that, maybe if he talked to his best friend, he could work something out with what to do about Astrid and her father.

When he finally stepped foot inside the village, he saw that everyone was gathered near his house. \_Oh great, did Astrid kick dad through my door this time?\_ After finally getting through the crowd, what he saw literally took his breath away. Standing with her axe in front of her, in full battle dress, was Astrid. Her face had black lines painted across them, her armored shoulders stiff and unmoving as she rested her hands on the head of her axe. Her right foot was stepping on a round shield and her eyes stared straight ahead, until they caught sight of him.

Astrid kicked the shield over to him and pulled her axe from the ground as she took a stance that he knew all too well. "Arm yourself." Was the only warning he got before she lunged at him with a fierce battle cry. Hiccup ducked and rolled as he grabbed the shield and scrambled to his feet as her axe passed harmlessly above him. "What!? What are you doing, Astrid?" She turned around and repositioned her axe before slowly starting to strafe to his left.

"What does it look like? I'm fighting you." Was her curt reply as she shifted her feet and swung her axe in a terrific arc. Hiccup brought

his shield up to block it and was jarred brutally by the blow. His teeth chattered and his arm went numb for a second or two. He heard Astrid start to talk as she continued to bash into his shield with her axe. "I'm not some weak woman-" \*bash\* "-that needs to be protected by others." \*slam\* "My own axe will-" \*clang\* "-carve my own destiny!"

Hiccup's arm felt like jello and when he used his other arm to help brace the shield, it quickly turned to mush as well. He had to do something. He couldn't sit there and take the punishing blows that Astrid continually pounded into the shield. It was then that he spotted Toothless bounding behind Astrid with a snarl on his face. \_Oh no!\_ Moving as quickly as he could, he twirled around Astrid's wild vertical swing and stood facing Toothless. "No! It's ok bud. Let me handle this, ok?" Toothless skid to a stop and continued to snarl, but didn't move further than the nearest spectator. His low growl rumbled throughout the crowd. Hiccup turned just in time to see Astrid finish her recovery, then launch herself at him again.

Her axe moved quickly towards his feet, so Hiccup jumped and rolled to the side. "I won't be trussed up like some prize!" Astrid turned around and used her momentum to help her swing her axe in a deadly horizontal slash. Hiccup had just enough time to duck before he accidentally slipped on the pavement and fell into her. They both went down in a tumble, but Astrid untangled herself from him with a swift kick to the ribs and a backwards roll. Hiccup got to his feet and looked at Astrid in confusion.

"What-?" He was interrupted by another war cry and Astrid bodily leaping into the air, coming down on him with her axe in front of her. With a colossal impact, she dented the metal in the center of the shield and sparks flew across the ground.

Hiccup reeled at the impact and backed away, rubbing his sore arm furiously. "I'm a Viking! I'll fight on the front lines and continue to follow my own path, regardless of if I'm married or not!" She lifted her axe over her head in a very familiar motion. Hiccup pulled the shield up in front of him and braced his arm for what he knew was coming. Another furious battle cry rent the air and a short whistle was heard before a giant CRACK! Rang in the air. Hiccup was bodily thrown to the ground a few feet back, Astrid's axe imbedded into the wood and sticking through it just above his arms. He groaned in pain until a weight settled itself on his shield. With a sharp jerk, the axe was removed from his shield. Then a quick kick shoved his shield off of him. He saw Astrid standing over him, with her axe held directly under his chin. "So long as you understand that, we will have our wedding."

Hiccup knew when to be serious around Astrid and when to throw sarcastic remarks her way and this was definitely the time to take her seriously. With a quick gulp, he slowly nodded his head yes. After that, the axe was removed from his neck and she pulled him up off the ground. Hiccup just finished standing when Toothless came over and nudged his other arm. Acting on pure habit, he turned to the dragon and scratched him in his favorite spots, saying "Everything's ok, bud. Thanks for coming." Toothless gave both him and Astrid a quick once over before shaking his head. Unfortunately for Hiccup and Astrid, it was that exact time that he smelled the abundance of dragon nip all over his best friend. The next thing that either person knew, they were being tackled by an extremely playful night

fury. Hiccup fell on top of Astrid and Toothless pinned both of them underneath him, nuzzling the pocket full of dragon nip that Hiccup had been carrying.

Astrid yelped in surprise before trying to shove Hiccup off of her and wiggle out from underneath the duo. Unfortunately, her armored skirt also moved back and forth, worming their way into the boy. "Ow ow ow! That stings!" Hiccup voiced his discomfort.

"Sorry, but tell him to get off!" Astrid's irritated reply came from behind his ear. It sent shivers down Hiccup's spine and thankfully, it was all he needed to roll away from Toothless and off of Astrid. His lanky body was indeed actually good for something. After finally digging out enough dragon nip to move Toothless off of him, he stood, dusting himself off and rubbing his sore arms and now legs. Astrid's voice interrupted his train of thoughts when he heard her start to speak. "So, let's get this marriage thing over with." Yep, Vikings were certainly a very impatient bunch, stubborn too.

Before he could say anything, Stoic's laughter rang out among the crowd of spectators. "I am glad I got to see that! Reminded me of myself and Val when we first got married!" Gobber was standing right next to him, nodding his head as if remembering the exact scene.

"Aye, but the lad fared better than you did, Stoic. You had a black eye on your wedding day. At least Hiccup chose to use a shield instead of a hammer." Gobber motioned to the now splintered shield laying on the ground.

Stoic walked over to Astrid and put his hands on her shoulders. "I'm afraid that we have to postpone the wedding, lass. You won't be getting married today." Stoic said with a giddy smile.

"What? I thought it was supposed to happen after the storm, that was the agreed upon time in the contract." Astrid looked Stoic in the eye with pure confusion and slight agitation leaking from her voice.

"Aye, that was the agreed upon time. However, your soon to be husband thought of you and decided to give you a proper wedding! He didn't want your dress to get all muddy and wanted to properly undergo the proper traditions for a true Viking wedding! So we are getting everything ready and when he's finished with the preparations, you two will be wed! It will still have to happen before the other tribes get here, but at least you'll have a proper wedding, lass!" Stoic was basically jumping for joy as he finished speaking.

Hiccup gulped again, then grinned sheepishly at Astrid. Her face turned to him with a look of anger slowly dawning on her features. He went to take a step back, but bumped into the semi-comatose Toothless laying on the ground, sniffing dragon nip. Hiccup had just enough time to look down at Toothless and then back up to see Astrid's fist collide with his right eye, then everything went black.

\* \* \*

><p>Gothi stood at her house, watching the commotion unfold beneath her. A chill ran up her old bones. It was true that this particular couple brought her heart happiness, but something peculiar was

nagging at her core. She was there when Stoic came and got her for his son's illness. It was not a natural illness. Staying out in the cold rain would bring about a fever and some coughing or sneezing. Nothing a young man could not recover from quickly on his own. No, something from the other side had haunted the boy.<p>

She had seen the thing that had latched onto him and sickened him. It was a blackened mass of smoke and sickness that attempted to lift his spirit from his body and take it to the afterlife. She had seen this particular thing before on one of the Vikings in her care years prior, unfortunately the creature had succeeded in carrying her off before Gothi could rid it of her. Luckily, she had found a remedy in herbs that she obtained afterwards and always kept it with her.

She mixed the brew together that would chase it away and allow him to recover faster. It had not stilled her mind, though. If anything, it brought discomfort and unease. Her mind had wandered to what she had seen when she entered the Haddock hall, shadows danced across the walls with scenes of marriage. She saw the celebrations and the dragon boy sharing swords with the warrior queen. After the ceremony, the shadows twisted and evil creatures consumed the two. A horned figure stood above the chaos as heartless creatures devoured the celebrating Vikings. The last shadow was the most abstract, but its meaning haunted her still: bones were the only thing left on the island to mark where brave men and women once lived.

It was not often that Gothi had such potent visions and even less so that she was able to stop such calamity from happening. Her only success had been the same boy who brought about the end of the war with the dragons. When she had picked him in the arena, it was not because he had vanquished all the dragons with ease, but because she knew that he was the one that was a Viking and a dragon both.

Gothi shook her head and moved inside her house, her terrible terrors all skittering about, investigating the odds and ends of her hall. She went to the back and used her staff to call them to her. With a sudden whirl of wings and squeaks, the terrors all gathered around her in rapt attention. Gothi pointed towards her menagerie of herbs and poultices before pointing to her traveling bag. Each dragon gathered a specific jar and stored it in her bag before going back to their wanderings. She would worry about it later. In the meantime, she had time to unravel the visions that the fire had shown her in the Haddock hall. So that is where she would go first to decipher what she saw.

Hiccup was the only person that had changed everything when she intervened, so she wanted to make doubly sure of her warnings and meddling that she would do to insure the survival of the island. After all, where Stoic's job was to defend the island from human invaders, and Hiccup's job to defend against dragons, her job was to protect Berk from everything else. She had done a pretty good job of it so far and she didn't plan to stop now.

**\*\*Sorry guys, this particular chapter is shorter than average. However, after writing it so many times, I figured it was about time that I just up and go on with it than hold on to it longer and make you guys wait more. I'll try to get the length back up to the usual next chapter. Please review and tell me what you thought! I absolutely love hearing your thoughts and opinions. It also helps me know what I'm doing right and wrong in terms of presentation and**



content. So thank you very much for your support!\*\*

## 8. Chapter 8

\*\*Alright, so it has been a while since my last update, but I finally got around to getting this chapter hammered out. Not as much Hiccup and Astrid dialogue here, but a bit of story and a little Viking mythology thrown in. I hope you enjoy!\*\*

Snotlout was a true Viking to the core. Every moment of his life had been spent training his body to handle the everyday life of his people. Violence was second nature to him and he even used it on his friends, in small doses of course. Every woman that lived and walked Midgard was fawning over his overly massive arms and his outrageously burly chest. Except for one. Astrid was an enigma that just escaped Snotlout's understanding. One moment, she was totally into him and the next she was beating his face into the cobblestone. And while that particular greeting may be commonplace among men, specifically what he did to Hiccup growing up, it was troubling to think that Astrid treated him more like a brother than a potential husband.

Admittedly, she was engaged now, but he was almost positive that he could still convince the chief that he was the better match and have her all to himself. So her betrothal shouldn't have caused her to treat him like one of the guys. Snotlout's eyebrows furrowed in confusion as he continued to drag his admittedly light load across the stone walkway to the chief's house. Hiccup was an unconscious rag doll scraping the ground behind him, unwittingly making Snotlout's day just a tad bit better.

It wasn't that he hated Hiccup, he actually liked him as far as people go. Hiccup was the one Viking that always made Snotlout feel better when he was around him. After all, compared to his spindly figure and girlish actions, all he did was make Snotlout look like a better Viking around him. For all his faults, he still held in there and accomplished something that no one thought was possible. Hiccup ended the war between Vikings and Dragons. Snotlout scoffed a little as he thought that he would have eventually did the same thing, but he was just too nice of a guy and let Hiccup do it before he did.

However, he had to respect Hiccup. Astrid was one of the heaviest hitters on the island, only losing to the chief and Gobber when it came to inflicting pain on others. Snotlout knew from personal experience that when she hit you, you felt it. After his unexpected beating that he took earlier, he thought about how many times she had actually hit people. So he started counting people with bruises. Astrid always left a mark, with or without weapons. Strangely enough, the person with the most bruises inflicted by Astrid was Hiccup. Sure, everyone had seen how many times that Astrid had 'hit' Hiccup, but Snotlout had always thought that it was just a soft tap that you give to a friend. Apparently, according to Hiccup's arms, they were not as gentle as he had imagined. A small bit of respect had been added to Hiccup's growing Viking qualities in Snotlout's eyes. Not that he'd ever say it out loud. That's just the kind of Viking he was.

Surprisingly enough, it was Hiccup's head hitting the stone steps

that snapped Snotlout out of his reverie. Toothless had went ahead of the duo and was waiting inside the house for his rider to be brought to him. A smirk made its way to Snotlout's face as he purposefully walked up the steps, letting Hiccup's head rap against each step on the way. After reaching the inside of the hall, a snarl was the only warning that Snotlout got before a tail smacked him in the back of the head and sent him sprawling into the floor. Toothless growled at him as he wrapped the previous weapon around Hiccup's figure and drug him closer to himself.

Snotlout shook his head and stood up, readjusting his helmet. "Stupid dragon. I totally let you do that." He started to dust himself off with his hands, removing the layers of dirt that had piled onto him. After all, only true Vikings were able to avoid Laugardagur while everyone hunted you down to wash off the dirt and grime that accumulated from doing other Viking activities. Toothless continued to growl at him as he slowly made his way to the door. Unfortunately, that put him dangerously close to the dragon and Hiccup. "You're welcome!" With that, he left the house, but not before another smack to his rear made him move a bit faster away from the chief's house. "Ow! Stupid lizard!" Snotlout went to go back and teach that ungrateful pet not to mess with him when the door was shut in his face and knocked him back on his butt. Dazed and slightly confused, Snotlout moved away from the door, grumbling to himself all the way.

No one knew what he did to help. No one appreciated his awesomeness. Astrid was the closest one to show him how much she cared. After all, Vikings loved violence and if you beat someone up a lot that obviously means that you have to like them. Otherwise, you'd just issue a duel to the death and kill whoever you didn't like. That was the Viking way. Now he just had to think of a way to get Astrid to marry him instead of Hiccup.

While walking away and talking to himself, Snotlout ran into the twins, specifically Ruffnut. Unfortunately for both of them, their balance wasn't the greatest in the world and the world rushed up to greet the both of them as they fell together. Ruffnut landed on her back first and Snotlout landed on top of her. Snotlout expected a bony elbow or rib to collide with his beautiful face, but instead it was a soft texture that he bounced off of. Curious, Snotlout lifted his head to see what he had landed on, only to see the bust of Ruffnut two inches away from his face. He didn't have time to think of anything other than '\_When did she get these?\_' before a fist slammed into his right cheek at a tremendous speed.

Snotlout went flying off of Ruffnut who was red in the face and screaming at him. His ears were ringing, so he couldn't make out what she was saying, but it was a little strange. His face felt a little numb from the impact, but he could still feel the softness that he had felt earlier. His mind moving at a tumultuous speed, the only thing he could think of was '\_I just touched herâ€|herâ€| boobs! I touched boobs before Hiccup did! I'M THE VIKING!\_'

Of course, it was then that Tuffnut decided to step in and tackle Ruffnut like Snotlout did when his hearing came back. Ruffnut pushed Tuffnut off of her and punched him in the mouth. "Wow! Tackling pisses you off that much? Sweet! Let's do it again!" Tuffnut replied, before his sister kicked him in the stomach. The two started fighting and rolling on the ground, fists and feet flying in every direction.

Snotlout didn't care, he had to go tell his dad. He had done the impossible! Sure, Hiccup killed the Queen Dragon, but he touched a girl's boobs! No one could say that but him! So he got up and ran to his house as quickly as his feet could carry him, thoughts of Ruffnut and her bust clouding his mind and making him forget all about his earlier thoughts of Astrid.

\* \* \*

><p>Stoic walked with a purpose towards his battle brother's forge. He had been ready to take Hiccup home when he had heard small giggles coming from down the street. Only one Viking had the audacity to 'giggle' and when it happened, it never ended well. So, after ordering the nearest Viking around that wasn't a Hofferson to take Hiccup home, he went to investigate the noise that always precluded disaster, Gobber's giggling.<p>

After finding him talking with some fishwives, he turned to leave, but Stoic stood directly in front of his exit, both arms crossed and an angry scowl in place. "Just what are you doing, Gobber?"

Gobber chuckled nervously and tried his best to look innocent. "I was just uhâ€| talking with the womenfolk so I can get a uhâ€| meal?" He looked a little guilty at that last part and Stoic judged it was there that the disaster lay.

"And what exactly did you exchange for the meal? After all, those fishwives don't go cooking for anyone but their own family unless it's through a trade of some sort." Stoic scowled a little to add extra emphasis on his questions.

"Ahhâ€| uhhâ€| well, you see, the thing isâ€| I was just kind of talking with them about recent events. You know how they are about weddings and such, so I thought if I gave them a little to think about, I could get a meal out of it before they thought about it." Gobber took a small shuffle step back at his glowering battle brother and sheepishly started scratching the back of his neck.

"What did you tell them, Gobber?" Stoic intoned in his chief voice that brooked no argument, something that he rarely used with his friend, unless he was being unusually skittish about a subject.

"I may have just pointed out what has happened between the two soon to be weds recently. You know, Astrid and Hiccup going into the woods, then a little while later, she's beating him with her axe. Just things that they would have thought of sooner or later, so I thought I'd get a meal out of it." Gobber tried to smile, but his tooth popped out and he took a couple seconds trying to catch it before Stoic reached out and grabbed it in midair.

Stoic reached out and grabbed Gobber by his beard. "By Thor, Gobber! You know what they'll say! Hiccup's life could be in danger! Do you want to see this village without an heir? Angnir doesn't know and he wouldn't have found out until after they were already married! Now, he might hear of it before they wed! Odin help us! We have to start right away! Come here, Gobber, you are to blame for this mess, so you help me clean it up before it gets too dirty." Stoic finished his loud whispering and shoved Gobber's tooth back into his hands, then turned and started marching toward his home.

Gobber popped his tooth back into his mouth, then shrugged before hobbling after Stoic. Stoic himself was running through the list off all that must be done and how to get it done the fastest way possible. "Gobber, we will need the wedding ring molds ready to use and another mold for a sword, just in case Hiccup can't find one in the tombs. Get the fires hot and ready for this evening, the sooner we get this done, the better." Stoic dismissed Gobber and picked up his pace until he arrived at his hall.

Shouldering his way through the door, he was slightly surprised to see Gothi standing in front of his fireplace with a bunch of different herbs surrounding her as she intently watched the flickering flames. Still, he had a purpose to fulfill and he ignored her presence and ventured into Hiccup's room upstairs. Normally, he would wait for his son to wake up in his own time, but time was something that they simply did not have after Gobber's little stunt with the gossiping fishwives. So he went to his son, who was curled up on his bed with Toothless wrapped around him.

Stoic liked the dragon, he truly did. Not only had he saved his son's life before, but it seemed to be responsible for the growing maturity in Hiccup. Still, if it was going to get in his way of protecting his son, it had to be moved. So when Toothless saw him approach Hiccup with his scowl in place, he visibly bristled and tightened his hold on his once again unconscious rider. "I don't have the time to wrestle with you, dragon. I need to wake him up and talk with him, it's important."

Toothless seemed to understand most of what people told him and that was the only reason that he continued talking to him. His intelligence proved itself when Toothless uncurled from around Hiccup and licked his face, trying to wake him for the chief.

With a little sputtering and groaning, Hiccup batted Toothless off of him with protests of gross and the inability to wash certain stains out. Stoic saw his opening and cleared his throat to get his attention.

"Dad! Uhh, hey dad! Why are you here? In my room?" Hiccup tried to sit up, but seemingly just noticed that he was in pain and grabbed at his left eye. "Oh gods, why does this happen EVERY time?"

"Son, get dressed, we need to hurry." Stoic brought him back to the present.

"Hurry? Why? What's going on?" Hiccup's confusion was easy to see on his face, but Stoic had to keep him moving.

"I will tell you on the way, now follow me, son." Hiccup was a little slow to follow him, but the steady clunk-step that followed behind him made Stoic aware that he was being followed. After they got to the bottom of the stairs, he saw Gothi standing there waiting for the both of them, her staff barring their way. "Not now, elder. We have to leave as quickly as possible." Stoic began to move past her, but she moved further in front of them and pointed at the fireplace with her staff.

Sighing, Stoic nodded and moved towards the fireplace with Hiccup in tow. Gothi moved in front of them and then pointed at Hiccup while looking at Stoic, then shook her head from side to side. "Listen,

Gothi, I know you don't want him to marry right now, but he doesn't have a choice. I don't have a choice and the village doesn't have a future if he doesn't. I won't stop the marriage from happening, even if you say he can't." Stoic didn't even glance at his son, but he heard his reply instead.

"Wha-what!? Ahhâ€¦uhhâ€¦ dad, she is the village elder, maybe we should listen to her?" He asked in a questioning tone.

"Son, I already told you that you're getting married. I can't change that anymore, not with the coming of the other tribes, no doubt trying to set up a match of their own for you. You have to get married, it's the only way to keep Berk strong and the elder knows it." Stoic motioned at Gothi accusingly. "So instead of trying to stop the wedding, why don't you help it along? Whatever dangers that might come, it's better if we prepared for them rather than run from them." Stoic was starting to get heated, but Gothi just sighed and shook her head. She walked over to Hiccup and placed a single bone in his hand before looking him in the eye and then patting his now closed hand. After that, she moved back to the fireplace and started to gather her herbs.

Stoic nodded gruffly and motioned Hiccup to the door. He looked confused and overwhelmed by what he had just heard, but Stoic wouldn't let him think on it too long. With a firm hand, he grabbed Hiccup by the arm and dragged him outside. "Enough of that, son. We have bigger issues to deal with. We have to get to the tombs as quickly as we can." He released Hiccup and continued walking, not noticing Toothless fall in step behind his son.

"Tombs? Why would we want to go to the tombs?" Hiccup stumbled a bit, then moved closer to his dad.

"It's what you wanted, son. A proper traditional marriage." Stoic continued walking, looking for the path that lead to the tombs.

"Gee thanks, dad. You're already expecting to bury me after I marry Astrid. Not a bad idea, actually." Hiccup's snarky response cut through Stoic.

"No, son. I'm not picking out a spot to bury you. It's tradition!" Stoic moved off into the path towards the tombs and started looking for the Haddock's burial mounds. "Every Viking, before he gets married, has to retrieve his ancestral sword and take it to his wedding. I still have your great grandfather's sword in my room, but you'll need another. So we are going to the burial mounds of the oldest Haddocks to get yours." Stoic offered nonchalantly, purposefully trying to avoid making a big deal out of it.

He remembered when he had to do this before he married and it scared him then. A dragon he could face, another Viking he could fight, but the supernatural always gave him the chills. How do you kill something that's already dead? Should you kill your own ancestor to protect yourself? Those thoughts ran through his head as he tried to muster up his courage to do exactly what he was expecting Hiccup to do now.

"Well, that's not gross at all. I guess I'll just walk up to my great great great grandfather and say 'Hey, I think I'll take your most treasured possession now. No hard feelings, I hope. After all,

someone is going to take it from me when I die too!' I can see this ending well. I think I'm just going to go home now." Hiccup made to turn around, but Stoic's hand found his shoulder without him even glancing back at him.

"Oh no you don't. You asked for this and we have to do it now." Stoic found what he was looking for and maneuvered his way around the gravesite to get there, again dragging his reluctant son behind him.

"Why do we have to do this now? Why is it so important that we have to do it so soon? I mean, how about we come back here when it's early in the morning and go then, instead of late during the day, right before nightfall?" Hiccup's voice was cracking a little, but he still sounded a little braver than Stoic did back when he had to do it.

Stoic reached the door that descended down into the tomb and brought Hiccup around in front of him and in front of the door. "Well, you know, if Astrid's father found out about, you know, that, you could be, well, you understand!" Stoic felt a bit flushed, trying to talk with his son about it, so he did what his father did, he opened up the tomb and pushed Hiccup into its gaping maw. "The quicker you get the sword, the quicker you can get this over with!" And then he reached into the hallway and removed a torch from the wall, lit it, then handed it to his son.

Stoic stepped back and went to shut the door when an overly large night fury scurried into the opening, knocking him over into the doorframe. The resounding crash shook the building and Stoic watched in horror as his son disappeared behind a curtain of falling dirt and rocks. "SON!"

\* \* \*

><p>After the debris had settled, Hiccup was swallowed in darkness, again. This time, he managed to stay awake, though. His eyes didn't work, but his best friend could easily see in the dark for him. Still, it didn't settle his nerves at all not being able to see his own hand in front of his face. "A little help here, bud?" Hiccup motioned at the old torch that his dad gave him, but had went out at the sudden rush of air following the collapsing entrance.<p>

A quick burst of energy later, it was lit again and Hiccup looked at the wall of earth that now blocked his only known escape. He stepped a bit closer after he heard the muffled cries of his father. "SON! Are you alright? You've got to be alright! Say something!"

"I'm alright, dad! Is there another way out of here?" Hiccup hated to yell in such enclosed areas, but he really had no choice.

"I don't know, son. I'm going to get some help and we'll dig you out of there! Be careful, son!" And with that, there was no more noise.

Hiccup sighed heavily at his dad's remarks. No 'stay where you are!' or 'don't go anywhere' from him. Figures that he still wanted him to go and find the sword. "Well, bud. We better get moving. We're already here and I don't want to come back, so let's get it over

with." Toothless narrowed his eyes a little, but moved to walk with his rider.

Hiccup held his torch up in front of him lighting the path and dodging large rocks that scattered the decrepit tomb. That is, until he saw another door. It was an iron door with runes engraved all around the doorframe. Hiccup had read about these doors. They guarded the land of the living from the residents of the dead. Called a corpse door, it was the only thing that could stop a draugr from escaping its resting place.

Hiccup gulped and slowly tried to open the door. Unfortunately, it was much heavier than he could hope to budge, so he looked at Toothless and his dragon obligingly pushed with him on his next try, forcing the aged door open. A horrible smell assaulted them both as air was sucked into the room. After moving the torch into the room, Hiccup saw that it came from the many different bodies lying on shelves, lining the walls. There was one corpse that laid in the back of the room and with it, a large double edged sword rested between dead hands on its hilt.

A cold shudder moved its way down Hiccup's spine as he slowly inched forward, with Toothless at his heels. "I think that's the one, bud." He pointed at the sword, his hand shaking with chill or fear, he couldn't decide. Boy and dragon moved to the back of the room, the only source of light, his torch, casting a pale glow on the dead bodies that lay all around them. The stench was near overpowering, but Hiccup soldiered on. He definitely did not want to do this again.

When they had both finally reached the corpse holding the blade, Hiccup was at a loss as to what to do. He couldn't just up and take the sword, it was too big for him to carry, much less lift. Toothless couldn't lift it from the body without harming it in some way, either. So he stood there, trying to come up with a solution. Finally, after a nudge from his best friend, he mustered up the courage to test how heavy the sword was, exactly. He reached his hand out and saw the hands he would have to touch to retrieve the blade and almost puked. Still, he steadied his resolve and moved closer—only to be stopped by a cold and very dead hand that grabbed his wrist.

In a wheezy, but deep baritone voice, the corpse that had quite unexpectedly moved addressed the frightened heir. "Who dares bring a dragon into my burial chambers?"

Hiccup saw his life flash before his eyes, fear gripped him wholly and froze him on the spot. He couldn't even think, much less answer a question. Toothless shrieked in fear, then started to growl menacingly, which shocked him back into action. "No! Bud, no! Uhh—Hi, errr—hello, sir. My name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Uhh—Nice to err—meet you?" It was awkward, full of surprise and fear, with more than a little curiosity thrown into the mix, but it was definitely something that Hiccup had done.

"Haddock? One of mine?" The corpse released his hand and moved to stand in front of him. Hiccup realized that the entire room had started to rouse itself when his attention was moved back towards the thing in front of him. He remembered the old stories that Gobber used to tell about these creatures, these haugbui. Undead

Vikings that lived in their tombs. He never thought that he would actually meet one, heck, he thought they were just stories! Then again, befriending dragons was much harder to believe than as well, so Hiccup stemmed his denial of the events and focused on trying to get out of the corpse door alive. It was the only thing that could stop them from harming him or Toothless!

"Why would a Haddock bring a dragon into his own family's burial tomb? Do you wish to disgrace your own clan name?" A little anger was seeping through his voice and the temperature started to drop some more as the rest started to stand around him. Murmurs of "Dragon." And "Betrayal" caught his ears as he listened to the growing number of awakening corpses.

"No! No! I came here because I'm getting married! And the entrance collapsed in on itself, so Toothless here, came to save me! Yeah!" Hiccup was slowly inching his way back to the hallway while talking.

"A dragon? Save a Viking? Never! I was killed by a dragon! My family burned around me in one of their attacks! They are the scourge of our people! And you brought one here! Bah! I'll end my own line before I accept 'help' from a dragon! Hrothgar the bold will never bend his knee to a dragon!" He grasped his sword in both hands and raised it above him, it barely scraping the ceiling.

"Wait! It's true! Dragons were our enemies! They killed hundreds of us in the war! They burned down our houses, stole our food, and killed our loved ones. But! Now the war is over! Dragons and Vikings are working together! We help each other rebuild halls, hunt more food, defend our homes, and make us stronger! Having them as allies is better than having them as enemies! I'm sorry that you were killed by a dragon! I really am! If I had been born earlier or if someone wanted to try to learn more about them earlier, then maybe it wouldn't have happened! But it did! I can't change the past! But I can change the future, if you'll let me. Toothless here is helping me make our tribe the strongest tribe in the archipelago. No other tribe has the same help that we do from dragons. We are not the strongest yet, but if you give us the chance, we can become that way! Berk will be the most prosperous and strongest Viking tribe that lives on Midgard. Isn't that what you want for our family? A good chief looks after his family and tribe, and we can do that if you will just let us." Hiccup did not know how or why this struck such a deep chord within him, but he couldn't stop talking. He had somehow stopped inching back towards the door and instead took a couple steps up at Hrothgar the Bold.

Silence filled the room. Dust fell from the ceiling a little as everything stood still. Hiccup's heavy breathing and Toothless's low growl the only things that pierced the room. That is, until a sword lowered to the ground and a thoughtful hum came from Hrothgar. "Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. I'll remember the name. If what you say is true, then the war is indeed over. Come closer so that I may look at you. Tell the dragon to stay. I want to see only you." His raspy breath echoed off the walls.

Hiccup shivered a little, but set his shoulders and motioned for Toothless to stay still. Then he took three strides forward and stood in front of the undead chief. On his way there, a tugging sensation came from his pocket, where he had put the bone that Gothi had given



him. He ignored it and stood perfectly still, letting Hrothgar scrutinize him.

The old chief had no eyes, his skull was barely covered with any skin and what little that was there was a black color. His fingers were all but bone, but had enough skin and muscle to keep them all together and intact. Remnants of his old armor had rusted and most of it had been left on the shelf that he laid in. However, he still stood almost the exact height of Hiccup's father, his gaze just as piercing and his countenance just as harsh.

"Your words ring true and your courage is surprising. When I was a lad about to be married, I trembled at the mere thought of a \_haugbui\_, yet you stand tall in front of an entire room of us. I will bless your union by sparing your life and your dragon's. However, I wish to barter for my sword." Hiccup relaxed a little at his reply, but confusion etched across his features.

"Uhhâ€| sure? What do you want?" The fleeting image of them demanding his other foot flitted across his mind before he shook it away, hoping against hope that it was not what Hrothgar wanted.

"I sense an old treasure of mine on you, lad. It was a bone that I wore around my neck while I was still alive. I wish to have it back. If you would trade me that for my sword, then you may have it." Hrothgar motioned at his overly large weapon.

Hiccup's eyebrows furrowed in thought as he remembered Gothi giving him the bone. She must have seen this happening! That was why she stopped them before him and his father left! He was definitely going to thank her when he made it back to Berk! "Uhhâ€| sure!" Hiccup reached into his pocket and grasped the bone. Unfortunately, in his haste and clumsiness, he pricked his finger on the bone and jolted at the sudden pain. Then a bit more carefully, he pulled it out of his pocket, wiping the blood off of it before handing it back to Hrothgar.

Hrothgar curled his left hand around the bone before handing the sword over to Hiccup. "Then our deal is done. You may leave us, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. However, you will find leaving through the entrance difficult. So let us help see you out." He motioned towards the left wall and the \_haugbui\_ there began tearing at the dirt into the wall and in an ascending tunnel. "Follow the path that they finish and you shall be free. I thank you for the news you brought us from your time, Hiccup. Until we meet again." And with that, he moved back onto his shelf and laid still, as did most of the others. When the digging was finally done, the others also found their own shelves before laying in them.

Hiccup and Toothless looked around, unbelieving. Hiccup shrugged his shoulders and went to lift the sword. As he expected, it was insanely heavy. Luckily, he had Toothless's help and he strapped it onto the saddle. Hiccup whispered to Toothless in a hushed tone, "Let's go home, bud. Dad won't believe this one." And the two made their way into the small tunnel that the \_haugbui\_ had dug for them.

\* \* \*

><p>Snotlout was in the middle of telling his dad about his amazing act of bravery and skill when the chief had bellowed out a call to

arms, interrupting his heroic tale. Just like everyone else, Snotlout left his house to see what the emergency was. Turns out, Hiccup was buried alive with a bunch of old guys. Oh yeah, he was definitely the better Viking. Hiccup gets trapped with old dead Vikings and he has to have the entire village help dig him out. He, on the other hand, could accomplish the impossible and touch a girl's boobs with his face!<p>

Walking with his chest puffed out and a little flexing to improve his image of perfect Viking-ness, Snotlout strode with the confidence of a man who had no fear and in front of all the other Vikings that had grabbed a tool to help dig Hiccup out.

As he started to move around the side of the burial mound to get to the entrance, a hand rose from the ground and grasped Snotlout's ankle, causing the once great Viking to scream louder and in a higher pitch than any girl had ever dreamed of. Kicking and screaming in terror, he finally got the hand to let go of his ankle, then ran as fast as he could back to the village, screaming the whole way.

\*\*Ok, I am pretty sure that some have questions and I will gladly answer them. Just PM me or leave a review with a question and I'll answer it there. On a little interesting note, the particular zombies that I listed in this story are called haugbui because they do not leave their burial site. Some of the more savvy gamers might actually mistake them for draugrs (Skyrim shout out!), which are the same thing, but they leave their burial sites. Just a little interesting tidbit of information! Some might see this as moving a little far from the story, ie: 'Zombies? Really?' Hey, if there are dragons in this world, why can't there be viking zombies? And I'm not turning this into a zombie apocalypse story, I just really like having unique things happen to Hiccup. I think they help develop his character. I cannot promise that I will do the best job at covering a traditional Viking wedding, but I'm going to give it my best shot. I'm researching a ton of stuff about it and I'm absolutely sure that I will get some things wrong, but please overlook it for the story value. If you are indeed curious to see how a proper wedding is done, I'll gladly point you in the right direction. Well, that's all I got this round! I hope that you enjoyed it! Please review!\*\*

## 9. Chapter 9

\*\*So here's the next chapter! I can honestly say that I got caught up in reading some extremely well written stories recently and forgot to write myself! \_ Sorry for that! I hope that this chapter can help things along, though. Enjoy!\*\*

Hiccup was extremely happy to see the stars after he finally broke through the ground. Fresh air rushed into his lungs and drove out the putrid and rotten smell that the haugbui seemed to permeate the air with. Although slightly confused at the unusually fast response time of his fellow villagers, he didn't question it too much. After helping Toothless out of the hole in the ground, he finally turned to see the ring of Vikings carrying torches and digging tools in equal measure. His father burst through the crowd, a frantic and worried look upon his face.

"Son!" Was all that was said before he rushed towards Hiccup and inspected him from head to toe. Hiccup didn't really understand what

Stoic was looking for, but waited for his father's scrutiny to pass. After a couple of seconds, a relieved sigh escaped Stoic's mouth before he turned to the villagers. "He's alive! Put down your weapons."

Toothless perked his ears up at that particular phrase and Hiccup picked up on it as well. "Dad? What do you mean put down your weapons? Did I collapse a tunnel and bury another house?" Hiccup remembered THAT particular stunt. He still felt bad for the Jorgensons. Come to think of it, that might be why Snotlout didn't like him that muchâ€¦go figure.

"No, son. You came out from the ground like a draugr escaping his grave! What did you think was going to happen? I TOLD you to wait and we'd get you out of there. WHY did you have to go and pull these kind of things RIGHT before something important? I thought you outgrew that!" Stoic rattled off while doing another once over Hiccup. "But, at least you didn't hurt yourself. Can't have you getting hurt right before your wedding!" Stoic smiled happily, but it looked forced.

"Yeah, can't lose the other leg until that night. Looking forward to it, actually." Sarcasm dripped from his comment like water from a leaky bucket.

"Oh son, every man looks forward to their wedding night." Stoic winked at him conspiratorially. "But let's save THAT advice for the baths the day after tomorrow." Stoic smiled and smacked his overly large hand across Hiccup's back.

With a resounding THUD, Hiccup barely managed to get away with taking a forced step forward instead of falling down. "NO! UGH! DAD! I didn't mean-â€¦" Hiccup immediately tried to correct his obviously sarcasm impaired father.

"No need to be bashful, son. Every man thinks of his first time. You're a Viking! I'd be worried if you didn't." And with that short few sentences, Hiccup felt like crawling back into the grave and lying down with Hrothgar to die. His face lit up the brightest of reds and his head swam in disgust. He was NOT about to have this conversation with his father. Fortunately for him, Stoic's tact and attention span had always been a little short.

Stoic looked back at Toothless and saw the overly large sword strapped to him. "By Odin's beard! I know that sword!" Stoic reverently lifted the mighty weapon with practiced grace that immediately made Hiccup envious. He could barely lift the thing and his father had enough strength to use it like a stoker for a fireâ€¦genetics were so unfair. "How did you find Hrothgar the Bold's sword? This is the first of our lineage to be buried on this island! Hiccup!" Stoic had appraised the blade over and over while he spoke in awe. Pride welled in his eyes and Hiccup felt his chest swell. It wasn't very often that he got any sort of praise from his father, so it was extra special to see it in person, even if he could barely make out his facial features in the torchlight.

"Trust me, dad. You wouldn't believe me if I told youâ€¦" Hiccup took a deep breath and saw Toothless nodding his head sagely, like he definitely agreed.

Stoic looked back at the blade and noticed that it was indeed old and decrepit. "We need to have Gobber renew it a tad." Stoic said absently, as if trying to work out a course of action. Hiccup silently agreed with Stoic. He had no chance of working with something that heavy.

"That's uh... a great plan, dad. So let's...uh... try to talk to him about it tomorrow maybe?" Hiccup felt incredibly awkward and just wanted to get home. It had been a rough day and his bed sounded like Valhalla at the moment.

"Alright, it can wait until the morning. I'll get everyone to go home. You go and rest. You have a busy day ahead of you tomorrow." And with that, Stoic walked back towards the group of Vikings standing over the hole that Hiccup came out of. "Get out of there! Show some respect! Look what my son got!"

Hiccup sighed, but patted Toothless on the head absently. "Let's go home, bud." Toothless huffed an affirmative and they both took off to their home.

Hiccup woke up to the sound of a series of knocks coming from his bedroom door. Groggily, he got out of bed and stumbled across to it, doing his best to avoid falling over in the process. After opening the door, the sight of Angnir standing in his doorway both confused him and slightly shocked him. Hiccup did a quick look at Angnir, rubbed his eyes, looked again, shut the door, opened the door, looked again, then woke up. "S-s-sir! Wha-what are you doing here? I mean, err...that is... why are you here?" Hiccup was tripping over his own words, trying to make sense of the situation.

"Good morning, Hiccup! I told you that I'd teach you a thing or two about combat, didn't I? So let's go! Get dressed and meet me downstairs! Angnir winked at him and smiled energetically. Hiccup could feel the bruises that he was going to have before the day was over."

Angnir left and Hiccup took the opportunity to hurriedly get ready before throwing his covers over Toothless on accident. The still slumbering reptile didn't even acknowledge the extra layer of warmth and continued napping happily. "Lucky little..." Hiccup didn't even finish the thoughts before he went downstairs to see his father proudly showing off the sword that he had gotten from Hrothgar.

"And then he pops out of the ground like a draugr and about scares Snotlout near to tears! Hefting this thing with him! Only my boy! Only my boy could do something like this!" Stoic had his chest puffed out and a smile on his face when Hiccup finally reached the bottom. "Speaking of which, have fun, son! Work extra hard!" and with that, he walked out the door, carrying the massive weapon over his shoulder. No doubt to brag some more and get Gobber to fix it.

"Sounds like you're really trying hard, Hiccup. Let's take a walk." Angnir motioned for him to follow and then walked outside. "I'd really like to hear what happened while you were down there! We got a little piece to walk before we get to the place I picked out." Angnir supplied, chipper.

"Sir, I don't think you'd believe me if I told you." Hiccup was

getting used to using that particular phrase now. But he was a little surprised when Angnir burst out with a booming laugh.

"I wouldn't have believed that you'd be the one to end the war between us and the dragons either, but here we are! The way I see it, you deserve a little more belief than the average Viking."

Nodding his head, Hiccup couldn't argue with anything that Angnir said. "Well, it all started when dad insisted that we go break into a burial mound right as it turned into nightfall. Who does that?" Hiccup then proceeded to explain exactly what happened while they walked together. With the casual look of astonishment and laughter at some of his reactions, Angnir surprisingly didn't question Hiccup's honesty.

After he was finished, Angnir just nodded a thank you to Hiccup for sharing, then stopped in front of a single tree with a few swords leaned up against it. Hiccup really appreciated how Angnir didn't question him and didn't make a huge deal out of it like his father did. It helped keep him humbled. "Alright Hiccup, you've got a knack for accomplishing the impossible, so why don't we try something easily achieved. I want you to grab the smallest of those swords and bring it over here to me." Angnir stood over about ten steps away from the tree in question.

Hiccup didn't ask questions, he went and found the smallest of the three and picked it up. It was still a tad heavy for him, but not unbearably so. However, in Hiccup fashion, when he turned to go toward Angnir, he knocked the other two swords over onto the ground. "Sorry! I'll pick them up!"

"Don't worry about them. Get over here first." Angnir waited. Hiccup stood in front of him, holding the sword with both hands. "Now, I don't have that much time right now, so we are going to focus on the most important thing that I can think of for you right now." Hiccup nodded in understanding. It was always best to start with how to hold a sword before you swing it. Made sense. "I want you to throw that sword into that tree."

"Ok, I'llâ€¦what!?" Hiccup had turned around and already gotten ready to throw before his brain finally caught up to his motions. "I thought you were going to teach me how to hold it or something. This seems like something only an expert would do." Hiccup was confused and it showed easily on his face.

"Well, you are not wrong. However, it is extremely important that you get as good as you can at this before I teach you anything else. Trust in me and you'll understand in time." Angnir sounded wholly serious, so Hiccup nodded his head, not wanting to cross the man again.

The first time he threw the sword, it landed hilt first on the ground and fell over. Hiccup sighed and retrieved it, only to repeat the process for the next few hoursâ€¦

Finally, after his arms felt like they would fall off and his muscles screamed at him so loudly that he was pretty sure that all of Berk could hear them, Angnir told him to take a break. He had worked his way up to the last sword and it was far heavier than the one he started with.

"You've been doing well, lad. You finally hit the tree and managed to get the first sword kind of stuck in it!" He left out the part where the blade had somehow found the only squirrel hole near the ground and lodged itself into it so much so that Angnir had to wiggle it out.

"Yeah, that's great. All the squirrels will fear my blade when I walk in the woods." Hiccup knew he was being sarcastic and rude, but his mood had soured a lot since they began. He continually wanted to ask Angnir why he was throwing full blown swords into a tree. He did not see ANY of the Vikings in Berk using that particular technique, even on flying dragons when they were still being raided. Hammers and axes, yes, but never swords.

Angnir continued to nurse a mead horn at his side while he sat across from Hiccup, obviously thinking about something. Hiccup shook his head and tried his best to rid himself of those thoughts. Angnir was doing this because he wanted to help him. So he shouldn't be so snide and rude to him. So, shifting gears, Hiccup wracked his brain for another problem to solve.

He didn't know a lot about weddings, but everything that he'd been doing recently had been about nothing but tradition. It didn't have enough meaning behind it. He hated that. He felt like he was just going through the motions. So he made up his mind right there. He wanted to make it personal, something that would mean something important to him and Astrid. He had tried to stop it from happening earlier, but failed. Now he felt that he had to make it up to her somehow—or he'd have to fight her like he did earlier every day for the rest of his married life with her.

Doing something like that for her was hard to accomplish. He wracked his brain but just couldn't get past the obvious gifts that one Viking would give to another. Like an axe or a sword or a yak. Taking a glance at Angnir, he knew that her father would probably know, but asking him was kind of like cheating—

That's when it hit him. Astrid's father. Hiccup grabbed the notebook he always kept in his jacket and pulled out his charcoal pencil.

"Sir, um— I kind of need your help. You see, I want to give Astrid a gift, but I can't do it alone. Would you mind helping me out a bit?" Hiccup scooted over toward Angnir and sat down next to him.

"What do you need, lad?" Angnir glanced at him, extremely interested.

"Well, I was too young, so I don't remember much, but I could use your memory to help me out. So let me show you."

\* \* \*

><p>Gobber was putting the finishing touches on the great sword that Stoic brought over when he finally had enough. "Alright, Stoic! I know that you're proud of him and all, but even I can get tired of hearing a good story after listening to it seven times in a row! Now, I've finished the sword for Hiccup. I used the last of the good iron

that we had to make it as sturdy and light as I can. What do you think?"<p>

Stoic finally shut up for a bit and took the sword while looking at its new appearance. Just as Gobber said, it was a lot lighter and didn't have any signs of decay anywhere on it. A truly worthy weapon of any Viking. "You did well, old friend. Thank you. Now, I have only one more thing to ask before I have to go to the great hall. Hiccup has to make the wedding rings and I want you to help him."

"Aye, I thought that was a given. After all, I've made plenty in my day." Gobber started buffing his nonexistent fingernails on his beard.

"I know, but this is special." Stoic solemnly reached into his armor and pulled something out of one of the pockets. Once in hand, he showed it to Gobber.

Gobber sucked in a breath and looked from the pair of silver rings and then back to Stoic. "Those are your rings! How do you have both of them? I thought Valka's was lost when she--"

"We didn't wear them into battle. Her ring was in our room with mine when our house collapsed. They survived the fire and I've carried them with me ever since. I don't have a use for them anymore, but I know that this is what she'd want." Stoic was whispering towards the end. "It's something that the both of us can give our son even thoughâ€|.yeah." Stoic's voice trailed off as he looked down sadly.

Gobber nodded in mute approval. He took the rings in his hand and put them on a bench. "I'll melt them down and get the lad to work on them. He still has to work on them, but I'll make sure that he's extra careful." Stoic nodded once, then turned to leave, sword on his shoulder once again. "Now get out of here! I can't concentrate with you drooling all over my tools! Go tell the fishwives! You might get a free meal out of it!" Stoic chuckled a bit, then raised his hand in farewell and left through the door.

Silence filled the forge after the chieftan left. Gobber sighed once, then went about readying the forge for more delicate work. Not too long after he had finished, Hiccup came walking in the door, nose in his book. "Well, it's nice to see you up so early in the morning!" Gobber tried his best to sound chipper and more or less succeeded. It took quite a bit to keep him down.

Hiccup put his book in his jacket pocket and sighed. "You have no idea."

"Well, no time for that. We have work to do! It's about time that we get those wedding leashesâ€|errâ€| bands, wedding bands made! I've already got the metal all heated up and almost melted down. I just need to go run a quick errand and then we'll start. So watch after the forge until I get back." Gobber turned around and walked out the door, not waiting for a reply. He silently prayed to Odin that Hiccup didn't set fire to anything while he was gone. Still, he had to do this.

Gobber went around to the Hofferson house and knocked on the door. Finally, after a few repetitions and a groan that he was certain came

from a dragon, the door opened up to a very sleepy Astrid Hofferson. "Morning, lass! I need to do something real quick." Again, not waiting for a reply, Gobber took a leather strip from his belt and grabbed Astrid's hand. After messing around with her fingers for a bit, he released her. "Alright, that'll do it. Go back to bed, lass. You sound like a gronckle!" Gobber turned back around and walked off, not even glancing back at the thoroughly confused girl.

A quick few minutes later, he was back in the forge with a certain length of leather. He measured out the length and set it aside for later, then turned to the still thinking Hiccup and playfully kicked him in the rear. "You planning on staying there all day looking at nothing? Or are you going to help me make your collar ..errâ€|rings?"

Hiccup smirked and then grabbed a couple of gloves. "Sure. The quicker I get out of here, the quicker I get back to bed." Gobber noticed that he was distracted. There wasn't a sarcastic remark or quip that he was expecting to come from the boy. Still, he smiled. Nerves got to everybody when their wedding day cameâ€|except him. After all, nobody could make Gobber the Belch sweat! So with a hardy laugh and a smile, he went about helping his apprentice with the rings.

Unfortunately for Gobber, the making of the rings did not go as fast as he had hoped. Hiccup had insisted on making intricate patterns on the band. That meant that a couple of simple metal rings that took at maximum a couple of hours turned into a couple works of art that would take all day. Still, he had promised Stoic that he'd help Hiccup and he kept the promises he made with his battle brother. That didn't mean that he wouldn't get Stoic to pay for it with a few pints later, but for now, he suffered through it.

Finally after the rings were finished to Hiccup's outrageous standards, he looked outside and saw that it was late afternoon. There was maybe another couple hours of sunlight left. "Well, Hiccup, I think you've gone and wasted your last day of freedom â€| errâ€| preparation."

Hiccup grunted, but didn't reply. He was too absorbed in the rings and something else in his notebook. Gobber had tried to find out what it was when they waited for the rings to cool down earlier, but Hiccup had diligently kept him from it. So far into thought, Gobber barely caught the tail end of Hiccup's sentence before he left. Something about throwing swords for a whileâ€|. Oh well. Stoic owed him a few pints. His muscles were sore and he had to tell him how great the rings looked.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup trudged back towards the village after finally getting that extra practice in that he promised Angnir. He finally got the biggest sword to stick in the tree and he felt happy with himself about it. Still, he didn't exactly know what it was all for at the moment. Sure, he trusted Angnir, but he just did not see the appeal to throwing your weapon at someone. Sighing, his tired mind decided to quit thinking about it.<p>

He was still happy and he felt that he accomplished something. Mustering up all the willpower and strength he had left, he made a



quick decision to go and see Astrid real quick. Yes, it was late and yes, technically he wasn't supposed to be in a girl's house after a certain time, but he had to do it. Tomorrow was a day full of traditions and expectations, so for tonight, it was Hiccup's night.

When her house came into view, he walked up and knocked on the door quietly, hoping that it wouldn't be noticed by her neighbors. Luckily, the door opened fairly quickly and Angnir showed up. "Ah, there you are lad. I was worried that something happened to you. How did the training go?"

Hiccup gulped and answered shakily "It went o-ok. I did like I promised and got the last sword to stick into the tree. S-sorry to bother you this late, but I was hoping to see Astrid before tomorrow." Hiccup's voice sounded shaky. Wasn't puberty supposed to fix that?

"Aye lad, I know why you're here. She's up in her room. She's a mite confused, though. Had her talking with the other wives today about what's expected of her tomorrow. So keep your head down. I'll be down here if things get tooâ€¦ uhâ€¦ you knowâ€¦ drastic. Go on up!" Angnir waved him towards the stairs.

Hiccup nodded and for the second time that day, was extremely glad he talked his plan over with Angnir. He absolutely could not have done this without his help. So, taking a deep breath, he walked up towards her room and knocked on her door.

A squawk came from inside first, letting him know that Stormfly was in there and then Astrid herself opened up the door and a quick shocked expression showed on her face before she regained control of herself. "Hiccup? What are you doing here?" She looked behind him to see if anyone was with him before she opened the door a bit and walked back into her room and stood next to Stormfly, arms crossed.

Hiccup walked into her room and held out his hand to her dragon, giving her a good scratch. Stormfly appreciated it and settled back down in her corner for the moment. "Wha-well, we're getting married tomorrow."

Astrid rolled her eyes. "Oh really? I haven't noticed."

Hiccup tried to continue anyway. He had something to say and it was important. Astrid needed to fight him to get her point across and he understood that. It was something she knew and felt comfortable doing all her life. Talking to slightly angry and confused hostile beings sort of fell into his category, though. "Well, there are a couple things that I wanted to tell you before everything became so..well..final." Hiccup took a deep breath.

Astrid relaxed a little at that. She let her hands fall to her sides and sat on the bed, still looking at Hiccup. "Alright. I'm listening, Hiccup."

"Ok, here goes." Hiccup sighed as if collecting his thoughts. "I know I promised that I would stop this from happening, Astrid. But after everything that happened, I can't. But I just can't stand the thought of getting you involved in a life that makes you unhappy. Out of

everyone on this island, you were the first person who tried to understand me and gave me the chance to show you something different. You didn't scream traitor at my face and try to throw me off the island. I want you to be happy, Astrid. And I feel horrible for being the one to tie you down to a life you never wanted." Hiccup turned towards Stormfly and started rubbing her jaw. It helped soothe his mind and calm his shaking body.

He was about to continue when he heard a voice from behind him. "You stopped a war that had been going on since Vikings first landed here, killed the biggest dragon anyone has ever seen, and brought dragons to live with all of us as friends in our homes. You've done amazing things, Hiccup, but you have NEVER made me unhappy." Hiccup turned around to see that she was standing up now, almost two steps away from him.

"But the way you reacted to everything, I just thought that youâ€¦well, hated me for not stopping the wedding." Hiccup was a tad confused, but seeing a calm Astrid sort of threw him off a little bit. Especially since it wasn't the reaction he had expected.

"Hiccup, I'm not a fool. I know what you can and can't do regarding Viking laws. Your dad is the chief! I don't hold that against you. Besides, if I was marrying anyone other than you, I just wouldn't go through with it. Become a shield maiden and force them to give up the whole idea." Astrid moved one step closer and looked into his eyes.

To say that he was surprised was an understatement. He'd expected tons of anger, throwing projectiles and maybe even a few poisonous nadder spikes thrown in the mix, but this was something he just didn't believe would happen. "Wha-What!?" Hiccup just looked into her eyes, their color capturing his attention wholly. Unfortunately, a soft croon from Stormfly uprooted his thoughts and made him jump back a bit. "Well, Iâ€¦uhh.. that'sâ€¦relieving." Hiccup fumbled around and regained his footing.

A small smirk made its way across Astrid's face. "Well, that and since you're going to be chief, I can help keep you from blowing up our entire village." She turned and walked over to her bed again, then sat back down, smirk still firmly in place.

Hiccup smiled a bit at her attitude. He recognized this. This was what they were before all this marriage stuff happened. "Yeah, I feel sorry for you. Tough job." Astrid smiled a bit more, then looked at Hiccup as if expecting him to keep talking. "Truth is, tomorrow is all about tradition and ceremony. You of all people know how great I am at following THAT. So I wanted to at least show you that even if we are both forced into this thing, I still want to show youâ€¦show you that this means more to me than just following traditions." Hiccup reached into his vest and pulled out his notebook.

"I know that I'm supposed to give you a morning after present and all, and I still will, but I wanted to make sure that you got this from me, you know, before everything changes." He held out the notebook and waited for her to take it.

Astrid looked at him a little weirdly. Hiccup had never seen that expression on her face before. Like she was in awe, yet uncertain

about something. Still, he handed her the notebook and she started to open it, only to realize that it was only containing a folded piece of paper inside of it, a quite large piece of folded paper. Hiccup explained himself a bit while she tried to carefully unwrap it. "I had to ask your dad for a little help. I don't remember much since it happened so long ago, but I was able to figure out how to draw that with his help." Hiccup waited patiently for her to finally fold out the last half.

There, in Astrid's lap was a charcoal drawing of her mother smiling down at a drawing of her while she flew on Stormfly below her, as if watching over her from Valhalla.

**\*\*And there you have it folks! The next chapter in POL! I hope it wasn't too disappointing. Next chapter is the weddingâ€¦sorta. I'll let you think about what might happen, but if you feel like sharing, please hit that review button down there! I love hearing from you guys! Plus, it really helps inspire me when people tell me their favorite parts or things that need worked on. I am doing my best to write a good story and I hope I live up to your expectations!\*\***

## 10. Chapter 10

**\*\*It's back! I tried not to wait too long before I let out the next chapter after the cliffhanger I left you guys on. A special thank you to the reviewer that corrected my spelling error in writing Stoick's name. I will try to go back and fix a LOT of errors pretty soon, so give me a little more time and I'll get right on it! Until then, please enjoy the next installment of POL!**  
**>\*side note\*** I have a question for you readers at the end of the chapter, please read it if you wouldn't mind. Thank you very much!**<strong>**

Astrid was shocked. No, she was much more than that. Sitting in her lap, slightly wrinkled, but a well-drawn picture of the last person she expected to see. So well was the drawing, that it captured that one look that her mother always gave her right before she left to go training with her axe when she was younger. Her brown hair was flowing behind her as she leaned on her axe, the one that she kept under her bed! The intensity of love that illuminated her face was so breathtaking that Astrid just sat and stared at the drawing for a while, forgetting that anyone was in the room for a minute.

Her chest felt heavy and her breath hitched a bit. Unbidden tears started to make themselves known as they stung her eyes and blurred her vision. Stubbornly, she tried to stamp them out with pure willpower, but she was fighting a losing battle. She didn't want to cry in front of Hiccup! Stupid Hiccup! She wanted to punch him for making her feel this weak! But she couldn't do that. He had just given her something so precious, so pricelessâ€¦

Luckily, her moment of indecision was solved as a knock on her door was swiftly followed by Angnir entering her room. "Sorry, Hiccup. It's getting late. Stoick will be looking for you soon. Best be getting home."

Astrid could have kissed her dad after that. Hiccup nodded awkwardly and said a hasty goodbye in a shaky voice before heading downstairs.

Angnir walked out after him, but left her door open. The light behind her illuminated the picture more. Finally, like a dam bursting, her tears swept down her face. She could see clearly now and saw how much detail Hiccup had to have put into the drawing. The look of love that her mother showed, the excitement and joy that she had on her face as she stood up on Stormfly's back, and the detail of every scale across her dragon were all there.

She didn't even know that her father had come back into the room until her bed tilted a bit after he sat on it. She went to look up at him and saw his look almost mirrored her own, with puffy red eyes and short breaths. Only he wasn't crying and he had a smile covering his face. "You should have seen what she looked like when he first tried drawing her!"

A small laugh escaped her before her breath caught and she couldn't see through her tears anymore. "H-How does he DO this?" Astrid managed to rough out before a massive hand moved the picture to the bed and then brought her into a loving embrace.

"He cares about you, lass. That's all it is. He wants to make you happy." Angnir rubbed her back soothingly.

Astrid started punching Angnir in the shoulders. "Every time that I talk to him, I hurt him! I just forced myself to accept that I was marrying him, but I wasn't going to be his little wife that stayed home and cooked for him! Why does he keep doing things like this? I'm a Viking! I don't DO kind and caring! WHY does he have to be soâ€|soâ€| " Astrid lost herself to her feelings and cried a bit harder.

"Compassionate? That lad is a special one. He's going to be a great chief one day." Angnir took the punches and just let her be for a bit.

"If he keeps making me cry, I'll have to kill him! Vikings don't cry!" Astrid was starting to get her emotions under control by now, but didn't want to leave Angnir's arms yet. It was warm and comfortable.

"Let me tell you a little secret, Astrid. Whether Vikings admit it or not, they all cry at some point." Angnir whispered to her.

Astrid pushed herself off of him, wiped her eyes, and then looked at him accusingly. "But you said that Vikings don't cry!"

Angnir nodded his head. "Yes, I did. After all, I had to make sure you didn't cry at all."

"But if every Viking does it, then why stop me from doing it?" Astrid was starting to get a little angry at her father.

"Because I have to kill everything that makes my little girl cry. It's a father's job!" Angnir answered indignantly. "I just have to make an exception this time. I don't think your mother would like me to kill your future husbandâ€|"

Astrid laughed a bit more at hearing that then reached around and picked the picture back up. "It really looks like her. He did a really good job." She traced her fingers over her mother's smile,

feeling warm and happy thinking about her smiling at her like that.

"Aye. He's talented, though a bit skittish about drawing when you look over his shoulder. Had the hardest time giving him instructions while he tried curling in on himself while I talked to him." Angnir absently recalled.

A smile made its way back to her face as she just imagined Hiccup trying to draw while her giant of a father towered over him, no doubt scaring him witless. Yes, she thought, he did a very good job.

\* \* \*

><p>Gothi stood at the entrance to her house, looking at the full moon. The brightness of the night seemed to contradict everything that she had learned the past couple of days. Dark shadows that the moonlight cast upon the ground seemed to move in endless patterns of destruction that she continued to see. The air itself spoke in silent whispers of the coming despair. Gothi's bones even quaked in resonance from the coming storm. She silently worried and thought in despair as her thoughts turned to darker images that she had discovered.<p>

Hiccup ran across the street in a rush to make it home, his clumsy stride causing an unusual squeak and thump that pulled her from her musings. She slowly watched him get to his house and disappear inside. It was funny how that boy seemed to disrupt everything he came into contact with. Even her own thoughts were apparently subject to his tampering. Yes, he would indeed be a force to be reckoned with when he became Chief. Even the elements recognized his comings and goings. The subtle shift in the wind that yearned for his touch, the ground that always seemed ready to meet him (whether by foot or face, it really depended on his clumsiness), and fire responded to his touch as a babe in the forge. It was surprising what signs anyone could read, if they had the eye for it. Unfortunately, that meant an eye for trouble as well.

The initial vision that ended in the bones of the Berk Vikings had been plaguing Gothi's mind with worry. More had been revealed to her and it only added to her discomfort. Now, a keening and deep sound rang out at systematic intervals while dragons fell out of the sky and into a fire below. Unseen hands pushed angry shadow monsters from the sea and chased the small children of Berk with a fiendish delight. The vision finally ended with the sight of a skeletal hand clutching her cloak and pulling her into a chilling grasp. Something was coming to Berk and it frightened Gothi. Usually, she could divine the cause and prevent it as she had done in the past. However, so strong was the warnings that she received, she was certain that it would come to passâ€|soon.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup woke to a very disturbing sight of his father gleefully parading around his room yelling at the top of his lungs. "My boy is getting married! My boy is getting married!" Hiccup groaned and went to roll over before he saw toothless smack Stoick on the butt for being too noisy. "Hahaha! Go ahead, dragon! Do your worst! Today is going to be a great day!" and he continued to do a jig and sing while he collected Hiccup's wedding clothes.<p>

A groan worked its way past Hiccup's mouth and he rolled over to go back to sleep. Whatever his dad was yelling about, it wasn't that impor- Hiccup sat up in a rush. HIS wedding! Oh gods, he had forgotten! Cold sweat broke out all over him. His stomach started to do flips and he started shaking. He wasn't ready for this! Luckily, a meaty hand grasped him and pulled him from his fright. "No, Hiccup. No running away from this! Today is going to be a great day! Now come on! It's time for your bath!"

With that, Hiccup was bodily jerked out of bed and held by the scruff of his neck while being carried downstairs to greet the group of men downstairs. Gobber was standing next to a giant bathtub (the same one that he had been put in previously that week) with Spitelout and Snotlout standing beside him. Hiccup cringed at the mere thought of washing anywhere near these people on washday, let alone in front of them on his wedding day. Cold chills swept up his spine at what he knew was coming next.

"It's about time you got out of bed! Thought I'd have to start yelling dragon attack again just to get you moving!" Gobber shifted from foot to peg leg in what Hiccup thought was discomfort. Yep, when he becomes chief, he'd get rid of this stupid tradition.

"Stoick, he already looks like a drowned rat if you carry him like that. At least give him some pride of his own and let him walk down the stairs!" Spitelout grunted at the chief.

"No can do. Wedding jitters about had him out the window and on that blasted dragon this morning. Had to catch him before his feet caught up with his mind." Stoick joked. "Alright son. The boats of the other tribes have been spotted across the sea, so let's get this started. It's going to be a great day!"

Hiccup was finally released and then surrounded by a wall of muscle and grins. He knew that this would happen, but he pushed it to the back of his mind every time it showed up. He really wished he had put more thought into how to avoid this than he had. So, sighing, Hiccup got undressed and entered the tub. Almost as if it was practiced, each man grabbed a cleaning utensil and started to clean him.

"Alright, now listen here son. You have to be gentle with her. I know that you said you have been thinking about your wedding night, but its-" Hiccup couldn't take it anymore and dunked himself underwater. Yep, he was going to drown himself before he listened to that kind of talk.

Luckily for him, Stoick seemed caught up in the explanation and when Hiccup resurfaced, all he heard was "- and that's all you need to know about that." Unfortunately, it seemed that Stoick wasn't the only one to give him advice. As he gasped for air, Snotlout whispered to him "Touch her boobs."

And back into the water he went. Hearing anything at all concerning this was embarrassing enough as it was, but hearing it from his cousin was almost as bad as hearing it from his father. And so the bath continued in this way. Hiccup would surface, Snotlout would whisper "Touch her boobs. With your face. I did and it was awesome!" And another Viking would start in on another particularly important

tidbit of information that he needed to know before he went back under again, thus continuing the vicious cycle.

Finally, after nearly drowning himself and breaking a new personal record of just over 2 minutes underwater, Hiccup finally finished with getting every inch of dust and grime scrubbed mercilessly off of him. "So is there anything you didn't understand?" Stoick looked at him in concern.

"Nope, dad. I got it. I don't think I will EVER need to hear it againâ€|ever." Hiccup awkwardly dried himself off and dressed in his finest clothes.

"Well, if that's it, then we need to head out to the place where you'll be getting married. Today is going to be a great day!" Stoick put his hand on Hiccup's shoulder and pulled him along as they left for the open area in front of the great hall where he was going to marry Astrid.

Stoick looked closely at Hiccup and his shaking knees. A small smirk made its way to his face and Hiccup could only guess what he was thinking. "I remember when I was getting married to your mother. Felt exactly the same way. Scared to death, dreading standing in front of everyone, going crazy about forgetting the vows that I had wrote downâ€|. Oh noâ€|" Hiccup saw Stoick freeze in place.

"Dad? You ok?" Hiccup stopped with the chief and saw him go pale.

His shoulders suddenly had two huge hands shaking him to and fro after his father moved. "Tell me that you have that notebook of yours!" Stoick looked like he was pleading with him.

"Yeah, I do. Why?" Hiccup was getting even more nervous seeing his father so flustered.

"Quick, write something romantic on it! Then remember it before the wedding starts! You NEED to remember them!" Stoick let go of him. "I'll go stall for a bit. Gobber, make sure he doesn't run off! It's still going to be a great day!" Stoick seemed to be telling himself that more than the others.

Gobber sighed, then shrugged. "Well, you heard him, Hiccup. Get to writing." He waved his mug at Hiccup, gesturing him to get a move on.

"You mean I have to write my wedding vows right now!? Why did no one tell me to do it earlier? What can I write right now!? There's no way I could-" Hiccup was abruptly stopped with a light tap on the head by Gobber.

"You'll do fine. Now write something. You always come through in a pinch." He seemed not to worry about it so much and it gave Hiccup a bit of confidence. So, taking out his notebook and charcoal, he stared at the empty page.

"I have no idea what to write. Nothing." Hiccup started to panic until, surprisingly, Snotlout came to the rescue.

"Dude, you should totally NOT write about her having a dragon butt.

Tuff and me did one timeâ€¦ my awesome jaw turned purple for a week. It was totally awesome." Snotlout rubbed his stomach, then grinned. "Fun times."

Hiccup looked at him like he grew two heads like a zippleback, then his mind began to whirr. He could do thisâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>Angnir stood at the wedding grounds impatiently. Astrid was still getting ready, fighting tooth and nail saying she would NOT wear a dress. So, he had to go and find her best clothes. Good gods, that was embarrassing. After finally bringing them to the womenfolk, they shut and locked the door in front of him and then the waiting began. Sometime after, the chief appeared and began to bring everyone to order. He looked to be getting everyone settled in and taking their minds off of the upcoming wedding. Angnir was glad that the chief was smart enough to realize that the bride had to have more time, so he stalled for her. He'd be an amazing father in law.<p>

Gothi was standing in front of it, looking like she hadn't slept at all the night before. She looked like she was more ready for a dragon raid than a wedding, but then again, considering who was getting married, it might have been a good idea. Still, he hadn't seen Hiccup either, so he was getting a little worried. He was lucky, though. For a few minutes after Stoick showed up, Hiccup walked up and stood at the altar. He was wearing a green long sleeve tunic with fur along the shoulders and back. His pants looked new as well, but Angnir never cared too much about clothes. He looked presentable enough for his marriage.

He had his nose in his notebook and didn't look at anyone until the door behind Angnir opened up. Some of the village wives started to exit and that's when he saw her. Astrid was dressed in a white shirt and grey skirt. Her sleeves were long and fur lined her collar. Instead of spikes adorning her skirt, they were steel plates in line with the seams. She looked like a fine warrior and a beautiful woman. Not caring anymore, Angnir grabbed her up in a bear hug and it earned him a surprised squeak from Astrid and a muffled "Dad, stop it. Everyone is staring."

Angnir just shook his head. "I don't care. This is the last time that I get to have you as solely mine." Then he whispered so only she could hear. "Your mother would be- no, she IS so proud of you and I know she's just as happy as I am." Then in a slightly louder voice. "Now get going. If you stand around too long, you'll scare him off!" Angnir let her go and then looked around to see every Viking respectfully looking away. He loved his village.

Astrid looked at him funny, then scoffed. "I tried that, it didn't work." Then made her way to the front. After standing in front of an openly surprised Hiccup, Gothi began the ceremony. Stoick handed the aforementioned bride price over to Angnir and he in turn gave Stoick the dowry that Astrid's mother left her. Then after financial aspects were settled, the ritual began.

A barrel of mead was brought out and opened. Its contents filled a wooden bowl that was consecrated by Gothi and then set on the altar in front of Astrid and Hiccup. Spitelout kept eyeing it with envy, but a quick jab from Stoick stopped him from whatever he was



planning.

Then, a bundle of fig twigs were dipped into it and flicked at all in attendance, conferring the blessings of the gods upon them. Satisfied, Gothi motioned for Hiccup to continue. Hiccup took a deep breath, then held out his hand and Toothless walked over with Hrothgar's sword attached to the saddle. With a little effort, Hiccup finally pulled it out of its bindings and, although almost beheading the elder, handed it over to Astrid. After receiving it, Astrid held out her hand and Angnir drew his sword and gave it to her. She gracefully reciprocated Hiccup's movements, minus the clumsiness, and gave it over to him.

Angnir watched in awe as silence settled over everyone. This was the important part. The exchanging of the rings and vows that cemented the ceremony and drew it to a close. Every Viking was silent so that they could hear the words that the soon to be officially wedded couple would say to one another. Angnir thought he was doing quite well. He was letting go of the only thing that he had protected ever since his wife died. Their last remaining gift to the world was being given away to another man, but he was happy about it. Hiccup would take care of her, he was certain. And the grandchildren would keep him busy while they settled into running the village together.

So when Hiccup pulled out a ring from his vest and put it on Astrid's hand, he felt at peace with everything. (Quite the feat for a Berserker, mind you) That is, until a distant call sounded across the quiet village.

From down by the docks, a lone voice cried with all its might, "Attack! Berk is under attack! Berserker tribe coming from the west! To arms! To arms!"

Angnir turned to look out towards the docks like Stoick and the rest when he saw it, an armada of wooden ships that seemed to fly over the water at unbelievable speeds. What they had thought were the other tribe's boats now carried weapons and brawny berserkers. Angnir felt his blood run cold as he realized that this was the worst time that an attack could happen. They had the dragons now, but the berserkers always had strange weapons that they attacked with.

Each and every Viking jumped into action, each entering their homes and running about to get their weapons. Angnir turned and walked over to Astrid and Hiccup, both staring at the boats in disbelief. "Astrid, Hiccup! Go to the forge! Get away from here and-" Angnir felt like he was punched in the chest. His body felt numb and he looked down in confusion. There, protruding out from his shoulder, was a giant bolt from a bastilla. He heard a scream and saw Astrid lunge for him in a panic before a sudden jerk tore him away from her and he was sailing backwards across berk towards the Berserker ships in the harbor. The last thing he saw was Hiccup grab Astrid in his arms and pull her back. Then as his vision faded, he heard Astrid's voice scream "DAAAAaaaaad" before the world faded into numbness and black void.

\*\*Sorry guys. I hate having to end the chapter here and I know that you didn't exactly like that last paragraph, but I'm finally getting into the meat of the story now. For those of you that think that I skimmed a bit on the wedding, well you are right. At first, I did it from Astrid's point of view, but then after realizing that I wanted

to end this chapter the way that I did, I switched to Angnir's perspective. For those of you that loved Angnir, my apologies. My little brother is beating me up at the moment due to the fact of the direction the story took that blindsided him. I'll try to get the next chapter out within the week as I hate leaving you guys like this. Plus side, I'll be revisiting this day from another person's perspective next chapter so it might help explain a few things better for you. Thanks for your continued support and suggestions! You guys are amazing!\*\*

\*\*Question: I've been toying around with the idea of writing a few oneshots/twoshots. Some in the same universe and others AU. The question is, would you guys be interested in reading some? Or do I just need to stick to this and never write again? Let me know! Thanks!\*\*

## 11. Chapter 11

\*\*Alright, so after a little soul searching and an in depth look into where this story is going, I have decided to try and limit the number of horrible cliffhangers to a minimum. (However, the other types of cliffhangers are another story.) I didn't realize how connected some of you readers were with Angnir. I have a hard time doing so with OC characters, so I didn't think that you'd be as invested in him as apparently you guys were. So before I get started, a quick shout out to my form of inspiration this chapter and amazing person! I don't care if your writing skills are -1 or not, your power of inspiration is enough to topple even the most stubborn writer's block! P.S. You're awesome! That being said, please enjoy this chapter everyone!\*\*

Chaos. That was the best word to describe immediately after the attack began. Stoick reacted like he would any raid and started barking orders to coordinate a defense. "Get those catapults ready! Swing around to the docks! We've got to buy time!" Stoick took the time to cast one sorrowful glance at his son and Astrid before he made for the docks himself.

The sight of Astrid reaching out helplessly after her father and Hiccup holding her to him in desperation caused a smoldering rage to build within his chest. Angnir fought in many battles with him and did the Hofferson clan proud with his prowess. But more than that, he was a friend and fellow Viking under Stoick's leadership. The berserker tribe would pay dearly for taking him from them.

Seeing Toothless roaring in rage next to Hiccup and using his tail to help move the couple from out in the open, Stoick got an idea. Berk had dragons now, so why didn't they use them? The Berserkers surely wouldn't expect Vikings riding dragons to attack them before they even made it to the shore! Shoving his way down toward the docks, where most of his people had gathered, he shouted for all to hear. "Get on your dragons! We'll take the fight to them! Let none of their boots walk on Berk! Drown them in the ocean with their ships! Fly!" Stoick moved to the catapults and watched the people of Berk call out to their respective dragons.

Sure enough, flying reptiles filled the sky and descended into the docks, ready to be mounted. In only a few more seconds, his people were airborne and ready to fight. It was so smooth of a maneuver that

Stoick beamed in pride. This was his village. These Vikings fought with him and they were very good at it as well. Those berserkers wouldn't know what hit them!

Stoick moved to help the catapults with firing at the ships. A few of them had been hit with the same weapon that carried Angnir away and it had almost crippled a fair size of their defenses. However, after taking only a few steps, he was stopped abruptly by a long wooden staff from the elder. Gothi stood a fair deal shorter than Stoick did, but she commanded the same presence as he did at times. This was one of them.

Gothi motioned at the boats and then motioned at Astrid and Hiccup, who had finally made their way to the forge. Stoick didn't understand the meaning she was trying to convey to him, so Gothi pointed at Toothless specifically, then back towards the boats and then shook her head. "You don't want the dragons fighting the ships? In case you haven't noticed, our defenses are being crippled as we speak. If we don't want a lot of Vikings getting hurt in combat, then we have to use the dragons." Stoick tried to explain his reasoning, but Gothi didn't budge, she shook her head again and put her staff down as if ending the conversation.

The ground lurched as if to punctuate her warning. A bastilla bolt had hit the ground near them and it was starting to make the chief nervous with how accurate the berserkers were being with them. He spared a quick glance at the incoming ships and the Berkians riding out to face them. His spirits rose as he saw the dragons begin to close in on the boats.

Stoick almost made a comment about how everything would be fine now that the dragons were helping, but his voice died in his throat as he saw a distant gleam being unraveled on each ship. "What the-?" He was suddenly interrupted with a deep and reverberating blast shook the air. Soon after, another followed. The loud sound confused Stoick for a moment, but dread soon crept into his spine as he realized what it was for.

The dragons and the Vikings riding atop them were all falling from the skyâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup was fighting a losing battle. Astrid was a mess and it was extremely hard to stop her from riding out to get her father back, especially when Hiccup wanted to do it himself. However, he had seen too many Vikings rush out in the heat of battle without a plan and get roasted alive before taking ten steps. After finally getting the girl of his dreams, he really didn't want to lose her to half-baked plans and berserkers.<p>

Her furious punches into his stomach and sides made it difficult to restrain her and her angry and accusing words battered at his mind. The only saving grace that he could attribute his endurance to was the one thing that he finally appreciated getting from his father, stubbornness. Luckily, Toothless helped out and curled the both of them together with his tail.

Finally, Astrid paused to get her breath after yelling at him and that's when he struck. "You don't think I want to go after him too?"

He's my father now to!" Astrid stopped fully at that. Not wanting to stop, Hiccup continued. "Every fiber of my being wants to get him back! And we will! But we can't go flying in there without a plan! I don't want to-" Hiccup stopped as a huge noise rang out across the skies. Toothless whined and covered his ears.

Hiccup swung his head around to see where the noise was coming from when his heart fell to his feet. There, in the skies, was practically the whole village of Berk. They were all on top of dragons and under any other circumstance, would fill his heart with glee. But not this time. This time, they were falling out of the sky, spinning violently out of control. So loud was the sound, it not only deafened and disoriented the dragons, but their riders as well. He could only watch as his people, his neighbors fell into the cold and unforgiving ocean below.

Astrid sucked in a sharp breath beside him, letting him know that she just saw it too. Wracking his brain, Hiccup tried to think of a way to save them, something to keep his friends safe. The ocean itself wouldn't kill them, but the boats sailing on top of it surely could. Glancing at Toothless, he crossed out the thought of using dragons, but upon further inspection, Toothless started getting angry, not disoriented. He could clearly tell where the noise was coming from and wanted to get rid of it. Hiccup wondered briefly why his friend wasn't affected by the noise, but then thought of all the times that Toothless himself shrieked just as loud when diving down for a well-placed plasma blast.

Not wasting time, Hiccup squeezed himself out of Toothless's tail and got into the saddle, clicking himself in. It was in the process of leaning forward for takeoff that he felt two arms encircle his waist. He looked behind him and saw Astrid behind him.

"Let's go." They were the only two words she gave him. They were simple and said with hardly any emotion. But he didn't have time to think about it, he had to act. His people were in danger. So, after nodding to her, he patted Toothless. "Come on, bud. Let's stop those ships." With a low rumble, Toothless pushed off the ground and leapt into the air as quick as he could.

Finally in the air, Hiccup saw that the periodic blasts of sound were coming from giant bells hung on the berserker's ships. "That's our target, bud. Let's take them out first!" Hiccup and Toothless worked flawlessly together. Whatever one wanted to do, the other would already know. Every other Viking needed to be trained to know when to respond to certain movements of their dragons while in the sky, but not Hiccup. It was instinctual. His body felt like it needed to move, so Hiccup just let it do so. That's just what he did now.

Cutting through the air, Toothless tightened up his muscles after a particularly harsh reverberation, then unleashed a plasma blast that silenced the particular bell that made him flinch forever. Smoke billowed off of the now flaming berserker ship and a new sound pierced the skies instead. Toothless shrieked and flew over the remaining ships, catching the last one with another blast at the bells.

Hiccup saw the terrified berserkers as they ran aboard the ship, grabbing crossbows and bolts, while swinging the bastilla around to target them. An idea hit Hiccup and he urged Toothless to fly lower

to the ocean and turn back to the ships. "Keep your head down! I'm going to try something!" Hiccup yelled over his shoulder to Astrid, who tightened her hold around his stomach in response. When her head rested against his back, Hiccup went to work.

He saw all the bastilla swiveled at him and the berserkers lining the ships with crossbows, all trying to take him out. A small voice in the back of his head told him that he really needed to be the one behind Astrid, but he pushed that thought out of his head and urged Toothless to move faster. Sure enough, he blazed in between the lines of ships and watched as the berserkers shot at him in a panic, not realizing their mistake until it was too late.

Bastilla flew from one ship to another, crossbow bolts soared onto the deck of the ships, carrying destruction and mayhem with them. If the crews were panicking before, they were hysterical now. Unfortunately, in their panic, the ships that still had a perfectly functioning bell continuously rang out now. There were no periods of waiting and a silent preparation for the intensity of its volume. Toothless was slowing down and that could kill them. So Hiccup did his best to move him into the skies above.

Breaking free of the madness they had ensued below, Hiccup took in how many ships were left and what all was happening. Below him, 12 ships remained and they were getting incredibly close to Berk. There would be no way to stop all of them. Of the 12 ships, one was on fire and another was starting to sink as it was being pulled under the water by another ship that hit it with a bastilla bolt. The Berkians were all making their way to the shore, but most had forsaken their weapons and metal limbs in order to swim to safety. Even if they made it back to land before the berserkers did, they would be weaponless. Their dragons floated on the waters, still dazed and twitching in sync to the bells.

Hiccup had to save the people before the berserkers got to them on the shore, but he had no clue how. If he could get the dragons to get back into action, then Berk might still have a shot. But there was no way he could do that before they reached Berk. Astrid jerked him hard to the right, making him turn to see her. "Fly us over one of the boats! I've got an idea." Astrid urged him.

Well, he needed an idea. He wasn't coming up with one by himself, so he opted to trust her. He flew over one of the ships, then turned to her. "Now what?"

Astrid smiled and drew the sword that Hiccup had given her. "This!" After that, she swung her leg off of Toothless and dropped down towards the ship. Hiccup felt his heart jump in fear as he was caught totally off guard. He was flying just above the reach of a crossbow! She was going to get hurt! Toothless snapped into a dive and made to go after Astrid when both saw what she was doing. Once she had gotten close to the main sails, she used the sword to slow her descent.

Berserkers are supposed to be the fiercest and meanest tribe in the archipelago. But Astrid moved in between them like the wind. Getting to the platform near the back of the boat, she used one berserker's helmet as a stepping stone to leap onto the bell and cut it loose. Once it fell, Hiccup saw her land on top of it and wait for the berserkers to start charging after her. Once shock had passed from

their minds, rage seemed to take over and they almost fought each other to see who could get to her first. Then, all she did was tip the bell over and let it roll down the deck at them.

The bell did its job and scattered the berserkers, but it did it a little too well. After falling off the platform and down the stairs, it crashed through the deck of the ship and out the bottom of the hull. Hiccup just sat there in total awe as Astrid took off running across the ship and grabbed a rope from the rigging before jumping across open water and swinging to the next ship. At that moment, Hiccup felt that marrying her was the bravest thing he had ever done.

Hiccup moved to go after her, but stopped. He had to trust her. If he didn't go to take out the bells now, then Berk didn't stand a chance. So, with a quick prayer to all the gods, Hiccup turned and flew to the front of the fleet.

\* \* \*

><p>Gothi shook like a sapling in a windstorm. Her small frame staggered to and fro as the world around her focused in and out. Her visions from the fire replaying in her mind, she saw all the signs of Berk's demise unravel in front of her.<p>

The marriage ceremony had happened and then creatures came to swallow the two up. If not for the special prayers and charms that Gothi had placed on them during the ceremony, she was sure that it would have been the newly wedded couple that would have been taken off instead of the bride's father. Then, the townspeople were swallowed by the sea as in the visions.

Hiccup was doing his best to take out the bells that tolled at the coming of the berserkers. It was easy to see why Gothi saw shadow monsters earlier in her visions. Every berserker had black war paint all over their faces. Their eyes glowed with a hatred that was only surpassed by their love of battle. At the very front of the armada, a great ship carried the leader of the berserkers ever nearer to the vulnerable children of Berk. Dagur the Deranged stood a bit shorter than the rest of his kindred, but his hatred and bloodlust was more than enough to make up for his slightly shorter stature. Atop his head was a great helm with long horns rising into the air. It was no doubt that his coming was what Gothi had seen earlier.

Shaking her staff in one hand, she threw some of her herbs into the fire that was supposed to have roasted the boar for the wedded couple's feast. Instead, it called upon the gods to help her people in their time of need. Slowly, but with building force, the waves began to rock the ships to and fro, batting at their sides. Lightning rang out in the distance at the invocation started by Gothi. Her power had been sufficient for all these long decades, it would not fail her now. She did not know what power the gods had seen fit to grant her this time, but she had no doubt that it would be enough to stop the coming doom.

Gothi slowly calmed and steadied herself for what she was about to do. If she could make her way down to the docks before they landed, maybe she could stop the coming omen. It would surely mean her life, but what Viking would not gladly sacrifice themselves for their people? She called upon the gods and their miracles, so it would be

an insult not to meet them when her time came. Her bones may very well litter the ground, but if it was just hers and her enemies, she would gladly go to sit in Valhalla and meet her old friends.

Gathering her staff in one hand, she nodded once before attempting to take one step. It was then that her world froze with an eerie chill. Something pressed against her shoulder and held her back from her martyrdom. The chilling freeze that seeped into her shoulder and erased all thought in her head threatened to freeze her solid. So complete was this chill that even her breathe seemed to freeze in the air. Finally, as if shattering the entire world around her and causing everything to move again, the pressure on her shoulder left and an equally cold voice spoke from behind her.

"Let a few old bones take that walk instead of you, elder." A single bone was dropped in the grass at her feet, with a small portion of blood coating the point.

\* \* \*

><p>Being a berserker is both the easiest and toughest type of warrior to be. Angnir found it extremely hard to force himself to go above and beyond the bloodlust that each and every Viking feels in battle. Earlier in life, it was easy to do. Go into a battle, get angry, get even angrier, and eventually you white out and wake up later that day surrounded by your fallen enemies. However, since then, it had changed.<p>

The first time that Angnir accidentally killed a shield-brother in battle, it had nearly destroyed him with guilt. Ever since that day, he did his best to stop himself from getting that angry near his friends again. It had worked pretty well with only a few episodes when he was left alone and outnumbered did he actually cut loose and go berserk. He was the reason the Hofferson name was spoken with such reverence in the mead hall. It was due to his berserk battle prowess that he caught the eye of his wife. Shortly after, he had his daughter and he vowed not to go berserk again in fear that he would somehow hurt his family.

He broke that vow the day that his wife was killed in battle.

The raid had went horribly wrong and an ambush signaled with warning bells led to the entire group's death. Even with an arrow in his knee, seeing the pale and empty eyes of his wife had sent him into a rage that lasted for days. He didn't remember anything but holding her one moment in his arms, crying over her. Then the next thing he awoke to was a burning village around him with dead Vikings littering the ground. All around him, warriors, the elderly, women, and children all looked at him through dead eyes, as if asking him why. Why did he kill them? He had screamed and ran away from them in both horror and desolation.

He shut down after that. Trying to shield what little remained of his sanity, he did not feel anything. Whether it was the cold, the rain, or the raging sea, nothing fazed him. He was numb. After a week of travelling, he made it back to Berk and it was on the docks of his beloved home that he finally felt something. A small body collided with his legs, stopping his mechanical gait up the docks. Two spindly arms wrapped themselves around his legs and hot tears cascaded down

his pants. His heart lurched once, then twice before he could not stop his knees from buckling and his arms from engulfing his daughter in a tight embrace. The sound of his child's cries brought him back from his pit of despair and healed his mind as his own tears mingled with hers that day.

From that moment on, he dedicated his life to her and only her. She had saved him from a fate worse than death and not even known it. So he buckled down and tried his best to be as good a father as she deserved. Teaching her everything he knew, except how to go berserk. If he could spare her that torture, he would gladly do so.

His thoughts were interrupted with the haunting sound of warning bells going off all around him that he awoke aboard a ship. His mind still in a fog of pain, both mental and physical, brought him back to the day he lost one of his most important people. Yelling filled the air, from all around him, men ran to and fro in a frenzy. Then, a guttural and pained roar filled the air and silenced everything else. It wasn't until all movement stopped that Angnir realized that the one screaming was him. Angnir Hofferson, the bloody berserker of Berk, was back!

\*\*This chapter was actually split into two parts, so this is a little shorter than I had hoped, but certain events had to be built up. Next chapter is going to get hectic. I hope I answered a couple questions this time around. Someone asked me if Angnir came from the berserker tribe and about how he was so different from Astrid and I attempted to answer those in particular while giving a little insight to Angnir. I'll admit, I'm having trouble writing these recent chapters because of what I'm doing to him and Berk. I understand that a good storyline needs both ups and downs, but it is harder for me to write the downs than the ups. I guess I'll just have to work harder as a writer to provide you guys a better story, though. I am extremely appreciative of all the support that each and every one of you have given me and your thoughts really get me going. This chapter in particular was formed from a couple of your questions. I still have another chapter to go to finish out this particular sequence in the storyline, but bear with me a bit longer. So thanks again everyone, you're awesome!\*\*

## 12. Chapter 12

\*\*Fair warning. This chapter has some mild gore in it. You have been warned. \*\*

\*\*Well, here's part 2 of the fight! I hope I do everyone justice! Thank you for all your marvelous reviews and I hope that you enjoyed your Halloween! (for those of you that celebrate it, that is) Now, onward to the next chapter!\*\*

Astrid was doing a splendid job of distracting herself from thinking. Nothing like a good fight to get the blood flowing and the mind occupied! Her movements from ship to ship only served one purpose, to destroy the bells. No reason as to why she was doing it made its way into her thoughts. She was too busy making sure that a stray blade didn't make its way to join her thoughts inside her head to think too much.

Regardless, after destroying the first ship, she made her way to the



second. Her body just seemed to know what to do and she did what it asked of her. After landing with a resounding thud on the next ship, she rolled under a couple of axe strikes from the now ready berserkers. She still had her sword that Hiccup had given her, but she really needed an axe. So, after rolling underneath the two blades, she grabbed a hatchet off one of their sides and cut into their belts.

With a strangled yelp, both men dropped their axes and instead grabbed their falling pants. Astrid had enough time to roll her eyes and think "\_Men." Before kicking both of them in the rear and sending them overboard. Turning around, Astrid could make out about twenty more berserkers between her and the bell.

\_This is going to be difficult.\_ She thought before she hefted the hatchet with one hand. The weight was lighter than what she was used to. Her aim would be off. Throwing it wasn't going to work. It was then that she saw the steering rudder of the ship and the berserker manning it. He was a huge man and he was a far better target than a measly rope holding the bell aloft. Astrid grinned real big before crying aloud in her best war cry, then stabbing the deck with her sword. The berserkers were a little confused, but it didn't matter. Astrid's battle cry was all the welcome they needed for a good fight. Roaring in turn, all of them rushed at her with battle craze in their eyes.

Astrid acted fast and threw the hatchet at the big berserker manning the rudder. Her aim was true and his head sprouted a new weapon, causing him to slump over the control bar and fall to the deck, wedging it between him and the side of the ship. Her plan seemed to work as the ship turned a harsh right and rammed into another one sailing next to it.

The ancestral sword that Hiccup gave her stayed firm in the deck, rooting Astrid to the floor. The angry berserkers, however, did not share that luxury. After the sudden change of direction, most flew off the side of the ship. The lucky few that did not fall to the ocean were jolted across the deck and met various wooden objects with their faces.

Smiling in triumph, Astrid jerked the weapon free from the deck and looked for her next target. Unfortunately, the only ship left close enough for her to reach was the lead ship. So with all haste, she ran across the deck and jumped across onto the lead ship. After rolling to a stop, she got up and saw that the berserkers were ready for her this time around. Five of them were spaced out and had their axes at the ready in front of her. It was weird, though. None of them made a move towards her at all.

It was during this thought that a shorter berserker stepped out from behind the others and looked at her with curiosity in his eyes. Astrid had heard stories of this particular Viking. Dagur the Deranged was known far and wide for his love of violence and war. His father barely kept him in check and was the sole reason that Viking tribes were scrambling for alliances against the berserkers when his father finally travelled to Valhalla.

His demeanor changed as he pulled something from his ear. Astrid noticed that it was pieces of cloth that he and his berserkers on the ship were wearing in their ears. It started to make more sense to her

why they were ringing the bells with such fervor and the slow reaction time of their fleet. Her revelation had to wait, however, when Dagur began to speak.

"So you're the bride to be! I would say that I am sorry for interrupting your wedding, but you see, I didn't get an invitation. A little rude if you ask me. Still, I came to give you my congratulations! Even went so far as to get you a wedding gift!" Dagur spoke grandly, but he motioned at one of his men and a heavy net was thrown over her, knocking her down onto the deck and wrenching her sword out of her hand. "I do hope you like it. I think it looks great on you!" Dagur smirked.

Astrid grunted in frustration and effort as she tried to work her way out of the net that was clearly meant for holding dragons. Her attempts to free herself was immediately squashed as the five berserkers that had watched her land all gathered around her and bound her hands and feet. Panic began to set in as she saw a white cloth being brought to her mouth. So with her last few moments of unimpeded speech, she yelled as loudly as she could. "HICCUP!"

\* \* \*

><p>The air whipped about in a frenzy as Hiccup went from ship to ship, guiding Toothless to take out the bells. He had purposefully stayed as close as he could to Astrid as she worked her way across the fleet. Some things never change, and her amazingness was the same. Hiccup thought that what she was doing seemed completely impossible, but she did it anyway.<p>

Of course, thinking too much about her own accomplishments almost got him a full serving of crossbow bolts to the face. Toothless grumbled at him to pay attention and Hiccup had to concentrate. There were 5 bells the he could get to and unfortunately, they were all ringing as fast as they could.

The bells were having a weird effect on Toothless. He wasn't getting disoriented, but he was getting more and more angry and hard to control. He was still responsive when it came to getting close enough to attack, but he was sluggish when dodging small projectiles. Hiccup had enough trouble as it was deciding which ones he had to dodge and which ones he could stay still and not hit in flight as it was.

Righting Toothless for another pass, Hiccup lined him up and watched as another plasma blast struck true. "Four more to go, bud! We got this!" Hiccup went to climb in the air, but saw another boat aiming directly at them. Making a split decision, he angled Toothless under the water. Again, Toothless was slow to react and it almost cost both of them dearly. The bolts were almost on them when they slid underwater with a splash. A sharp and burning pain sprouted from Hiccup's right leg above the knee, but freezing cold waters soothed it immediately after. Looking down, he saw that a stray bolt had decided to take up residence there.

Toothless switched from flight to swimming immediately. He shook his head side to side for a minute before looking back at his rider. Upon seeing his rider in pain, Toothless roared in shock. He groaned underwater as Hiccup ignored it and angled the foot pedal to swim underneath the ship. Hiccup may have gone underwater to avoid the

bolts, but he could still hit one of the bells.

Finally getting to the other side, Toothless shot to the surface and broke through the water, shooting a plasma blast at the bell on his way up. Shocked berserkers ran into each other in panic, trying to find the terror of the skies. Hiccup's leg twinged in pain as he used his legs to stay on his dragon's back. Still, he had three more bells to hit before he could even think about taking time to look at it. His people needed him.

Seeing the next two targets, he twisted Toothless into a corkscrew and avoided some incoming fire from the berserkers. Toothless fired off a shot mid-roll and struck the side of the bell, causing an awful whining and screeching sound as metal blasted itself apart and melted to the deck below it. Sometimes the pure force of Toothless's plasma blasts surprised Hiccup. This was one of them. He was so distracted by the damage that he didn't move fast enough and Toothless screamed in pain as one of his wings sprouted a crossbow bolt.

Hiccup yelled in fright before veering off and away from the ships. "You alright, bud?" After getting a small, but pained nod, Hiccup patted the night fury's neck. "Just hold out for a couple more, bud. Don't worry, we'll play these two safe. Let's climb!" Hiccup directed Toothless into the clouds and finally turned to dive at the final two bells. They were separated by a bit of distance, so he'd be chancing the last one a bit. But the berserkers were getting too close to Berk. They would be landing any minute now.

The bells tolled loudly and Hiccup was sure that everyone was hearing the last two in tandem, but the wind screeched past his ears too fast for him to hear anything but Toothless as he screamed in anticipation, the fire burning in his chest. Hiccup could feel the heat below his saddle. "Now, bud!" Toothless seemed to hear him and released a blast at the ship they just ran away from before turning to their right to finish off the last one. They lost a lot of speed when turning, so the bell could be heard clearly now. It rang loud and fast on the lead ship.

Hiccup grit his teeth and lined Toothless up, but just before he could give him the signal, he heard something that froze his blood in his veins. "HICCUP!" That voice that should never sound as distressed as it was now found his ear and caused him to jerk bodily on Toothless, making his best friend miss the bell and hit the berserker ringing it instead. Hiccup turned Toothless immediately to find where it came from and saw Astrid being tied down by five berserkers. Hiccup saw red. Toothless gave an angry roar and they both spun around to get to her.

Unfortunately, Astrid was shoved next to Dagur and it prevented them from blasting everyone away from her. Crossbow bolts whizzed by them, hardly registering through their haze of anger and rage. Hiccup flew around the ship once before changing tactics and heading to Berk. There was no stopping the berserkers from landing, there never really was. He just had to get the dragons back in this fight. He had one last bell to take out, but Astrid and Dagur moved to stand right next to it. So instead, he landed on the beach and tried to get off of Toothless, but his leg refused to move. Toothless couldn't fully retract his left wing either. All in all, they were not in very good shape to meet a berserker invasion by themselves.

Still, he had to do something. Astrid was a hostage and his people were all still trying to make it to shore. The dragons were all in the water and out of commission for the moment. His options were very limited, but he still had Toothless. He could do this. If he could get Dagur to bring Astrid out and talk to him, he could rescue her, hit the bell, and call the dragons to Berk's aid. It was a sound plan. It would workâ€¦probably.

His hopes were all dashed as the lead ship beached and all the berserkers rushed off of the deck and began to charge at them. "Of course. They're Vikings. What did I expect?" Hiccup thought about drawing the sword that Astrid got him, but decided against it. He could barely lift it with two hands. How in the world would he actually fight with it? As he saw the snarling and running horde of berserkers charging up the beach, Hiccup gulped.

It was right then that a strange, but powerful battle horn was sounded behind him. It rolled over the hills and sounded so massive that there was no way that it could be carried around on a person. It wasn't as loud as the bells or as terrifyingly blatant, but it pervaded a sense of unwariness. Hiccup had no idea what was going on, but he saw the faces of the berserkers drop from enraged to curious, then all the color drained from their faces and fear set in.

Curious himself, Hiccup turned in his saddle and saw something that both shocked him and confused him. There, marching down the hill to the beach at a slow walk was a small army of draugr. At their head, leading the slow, but eerie charge was Hrothgar the Bold.

\* \* \*

><p>When the bone that he had taken as payment from Hiccup had begun to glow red hot with fire, he knew that he was needed. It was quite unexpected to get his prized possession back, the tooth of his first dragon kill, much less have it glow underground with heat that even the dead felt. So, he gathered his Vikings and made an impromptu speech.<p>

Granted, it didn't take much to convince his dead brethren to go sightseeing. So they left their slumbering homes and started their way to the village they had all helped build. Hrothgar had to admit, he did not expect to see all the buildings decorated with dragon decorations or even painted. He was proud, however, to see that the great hall that they had built into the stone was still standing.

The village elder had been the first person that they had met and to say that her reaction was a shocked one would be an understatement. Hrothgar did not know what possessed him to remove his prized dragon tooth which had been missing for so long and give it back to her, but he did anyway. It was then that he saw what had caused his obvious involvement. Eight ships were slowly making their way towards the shore and all of Berk seemed to be absent.

The boy had done well. Hrothgar had watched him flit from one ship to the next, hitting the bells and moving on to the next ones. He never wavered in his drive to stop them from ringing. Now, that wasn't to say that the draugr understood what was so important about the bells, but obviously war had changed since his day. The slow march he had forced his eager horde of decaying Vikings was more to make them take

in their surroundings and watching his descendants than anything else.

However, as he saw Hiccup land and ready himself to defend his village by himself, an unexpected swell of pride came up from his chest. "That's my descendant! Are we going to let him defend our home by himself? The Hel we are! Sound the attack!" Hrothgar motioned for the horn to be sounded and marched over the hill. It didn't matter that his sword was gone and he was walking into battle unarmed. He was dead, what did he care?

Their presence had the imagined effect on the Vikings. They all about soiled their trousers and stumbled to a stop. Hiccup had turned around and Hrothgar almost chuckled as he saw the boy's jaw near hit the sand on the shore. Still, he had a job to do. Three other ships had landed and their inhabitants were all flooding out of the ship, only to stop in fright on the shore next to their shocked kindred.

Hrothgar growled from his throat and yelled a battle cry that shook dust from his almost gone lungs, then started to jog towards the invaders. His warriors joined in on the battle cry and a thunderous moan rattled the air and filled the hearts of men with dread. However, one jumped down from the ship, carrying a yellow haired shield maiden by her bound hands. "What are you scared of? They are just bones! We kill dragons! FIGHT BACK!" With that, the spell was broken and the enemy charged back at them.

Hollow eyes stared at the one who rallied the troops and Hrothgar angled his steps to make his way towards him. He didn't know who had attacked or why they were here, but to be frank, he didn't care. No one attacked his home while he was there, even if he was dead. The first burly living warrior reached him and swung a hammer at him with both hands. Hrothgar caught the hammer in one hand and ripped it from the hand of the man who attacked him. Without missing a step, he backhanded the man and sent him flying over his comrades.

As he marched, he calmly swung the hammer back and forth, clearing a path between himself and the leader. His brave warriors had all left their weapons behind and were wading through the enemy, hardly caring that a sword stabbed in their chest or an axe in their shoulder. Hrothgar swung his hammer to the left when a warrior jumped over his swing and swung his sword across his chest. It passed through his shoulder with a solid THUNK before lodging itself in his sternum. Hrothgar didn't feel anything, but instead started to laugh. His wheezing and shuddering laugh provoked his allies to start with him.

Their unholy laugh swam through the ranks of the living and terror spawned anew at their chests. Cries of "They can't be killed!", "They are demons!", and his personal favorite, "It is Ragnarok! The dead have risen for the end of the world!" rang out in the air. Panic flooded the battlefield and Hrothgar loved it. The battlefield was something that he had missed. Granted, being dead killed the thrill of wondering if you would make it out of the battle alive or not, but it obviously had its perks.

The leader of the band of intruders seemed the only one not affected by their unstoppable march. He tightened his hold on the captive girl when a shot rang out from behind Hrothgar. Sure enough, the final

bell had been hit by Hiccup and with a loud crack, it had splintered apart. Then a shadow passed above the battle and Hiccup's voice carried over the frightened cries of the men. "Let her go, Dagur!"

So, the runt's name was Dagur. A smile would have made its way to Hrothgar's mouth if he still had lips. Instead, he punched another Viking daring enough to get close to him, sending him flying right over Dagur's head. Dagur turned to see Hrothgar's hollow stare and bare skull boring into his soul as he marched toward him, batting his men aside left and right.

It was then that Hrothgar cursed the ingenuity of Dagur. "If you can't beat them down, burn them!" Dagur released the blonde girl and wrapped some cloth from his belt around one of his crossbow bolts. Sure enough, he used sparks from his sword and a stone to light it on fire. Hrothgar tried to get to him as fast as his undead bones could move, but moving quickly was something that you obviously lost when you died. Apparently, muscles help you move faster and pure force of will can only get you so far. So focused was Hrothgar on Dagur, that he missed the couple of Vikings that were charging him from behind.

It was only when he was bowled over and on his back did he realize that he had been tripped and pinned to the ground by no less than four blades through his skeletal frame. Whether it was lucky that he was down or absolutely frustrating, Hrothgar saw flaming bolts fly across the air and start to set his warriors aflame. He watched as already dead flesh caught fire almost instantly and melted away from still moving bones. "NOOOO!" Hrothgar grabbed the blades protruding from his chest and pulled them all out. He stood up and realized that he was now a target for the enemies still firing from the ship. So he grabbed one of the Vikings near him and used him to shield him from the flames.

Rage was something that most all warriors felt in battle. It drove them and made them more dangerous in a fight. However, something worse than rage threatened to bubble to the surface within Hrothgar. It was so powerful and came so quickly that it scared the dead chieftain. He knew what going berserk felt like, but this power came from something else, something much more dangerous. Tales of enraged draugr and their terrifying rampages ran across his mind. No, he would not succumb to that rage. It was not what Berk needed right now. So, with as much willpower as he could muster, he squashed the rage building within him and instead focused on the battle in front of him. It was then that two things became readily apparent to him. One, the skies were now filled with other dragons and carrying dripping wet Berkians over the battle and to safety. And two, he was not the only draugr to feel the unnatural rage that boiled within him, but he was among those that did not lose their minds to it. His warriors that had travelled from their own graves to help aid Berk now posed one of the most dangerous threats to them. "Bags. Why is nothing ever easy?"

\* \* \*

><p>Stoick had been busy. When the attack had started, he had stayed with the catapults and helped man an appropriate counter offense. However, the berserker tribe was scarily accurate with their weapons and targeted the catapults first. Those first few bastilla bolts that

flew into the catapults were expected, but after each and every catapult was hit by their assault, Stoick truly feared for Berk. With all the dragon riders swimming back to shore and no support from the catapults, they would be slaughtered. His entire tribe, wiped out by a foolish decision to let the village ride their dragons into battle. What was he thinking? Those things were only done in tales of the gods and heroes. His pride and confidence had overruled his common sense and it might very well spell the doom for all the people that depended on him.<p>

Guilt racked Stoick's heart and he almost let it take him over. It was a pained groan from underneath the destroyed catapult in front of him that brought him back to the present. Shaking his head, Stoick left the thinking about his own faults for later. His village may be in trouble, but he would help them in any way he could until he stopped breathing. So he set to work freeing the Vikings trapped underneath the catapults.

Halfway through his task, Stoick heard the loud peals of thunderous bells decrease. Casting a short glance in the direction of the still approaching ships revealed his son flying about and destroying the bells as fast as he could. Some other ships were sinking or crashing into others and yet one more seemed to have broken away from the rest of the armada and changed course to veer at the cliffs just beside the docks instead of the beaches on the other side. Letting a roar of pride fill his lungs, Stoick redoubled his efforts to free his people. Telling them to help him and then go to the armory to arm themselves for the defense of Berk.

Finally freeing himself from the task, Stoick ran as fast as he could to the Armory to help distribute weapons. Gobber had apparently stayed and stood stock still in his forge, mouth agape. Stoick ran up to him and grabbed him by the shoulders. "Gobber! Snap out of it! We have to fight! We need weapons, stop staring and arm us!" He shook him for good measure, but Gobber barely moved, his color looked a tad pale and his eyes continued to look past Stoick. "What are you looking at?" Stoick turned to see what had shaken Gobber so much and froze just like his battle brother did.

Forty or so berserkers were all huddled close to their ships as they looked in total fear at the approaching twenty or so corpses. Stoick had to blink and then rub his eyes to make sure that Loki wasn't playing a trick on him. Sure enough, draugr were walking on the beach, going to fight berserkers and leading them was his son, atop Toothless. Stoick's mouth soon followed Gobber's on the path to the ground, but seeing his son sitting in front of all those berserkers made him snap out of it. "Gobber! We have to help Hiccup! Berk needs us! HE needs us! And WE need weapons!" Stoick punched Gobber in the face, snapping him out of his stupor.

"AGH! Stoick! Are you seeing this?" Gobber seemed to see Stoick for the first time.

"Yes, now we need to go!" Stoick reached around his friend and grabbed a hammer. "Now arm everyone! I'll meet you there!" Stoick turned and started running towards the beach when he noticed that the dragons were back in the action. They were carrying their now very wet riders back into the village to get more weapons. Yes, soon this fight would be over and the berserkers would never harm his village again, if he had anything to say about it.

Finally making his way into the fray, Stoick ran directly passed the now flaming draugr and into the fray. Swinging his great stone hammer back and forth, crushing and bashing berserkers wherever he could reach them, he cut an amazing swath into the berserker's lines. His focus was on the now abandoned Astrid, who was using her legs to trip and kick berserkers in the head, taking them out of the fight.

Even tied up, the girl still fought. The spirit of a Valkyrie truly housed itself inside of her. Stoick had almost reached her when a loud whistling sound filled the sky and a plasma blast cleared the area directly in front of Astrid. Soon an upside down Night Fury flew feet above the ground and Hiccup caught Astrid in his arms before righting Toothless and continuing on. Stoick laughed loudly, seeing his son rescue his new daughter in law. Yes, the boy truly was his son.

Stoick turned his attention to Dagur, who was lighting crossbow bolts and sending them into the attacking draugr. With a roar, Stoick threw his hammer and hit Dagur in the leg, sending him sprawling on the floor. Then before he could get up, Stoick was on him. He picked up the other chieftain by his scrawny neck and pinning him to the side of his boat. "Call them off, or I wring your neck until it snaps." Stoick icily seethed at the smaller man.

Dagur seemed to contemplate for a moment before smiling. "I don't think so, Stoick. Or did you forget? Berserkers don't surrender."

Stoick tightened his grip, but images of Hiccup and the other children of the village sprang to life in his head. Dagur was the same age as Hiccup. He had never before failed in carrying out his duties to his people. Being able to kill a threat to them should have been easy. But he just couldn't carry out his threat. It was like killing a child. So instead, Stoick leaned in closer to Dagur. "Then let this be a lesson. Come back to Berk and the dragons will burn you to cinders." After that, Stoick slammed Dagur's head into the boat and rendered him unconscious. Holding the now limp leader of the berserker tribe in his hands, he roared again and threw him onto the ship. "Your chief has fallen! LEAVE MY ISLAND!" Stoick shouted at the scrambling berserkers.

He then saw something he had previously missed earlier. The draugr were no longer fighting the berserkers, but instead fighting each other. It seemed that even among the draugr, true berserkers fought like madmen and turned on any that approached them. It was a good thing that the tribe named after such warriors rarely carried the same trait. They were a danger to both sides of battle and rarely survived long enough to make a name for themselves. Angnir was perhaps the only one that Stoick knew to this day. That's when he remembered what had happened earlier and a profound sadness settled in his heart.

Battle was to be celebrated in any Viking society. Glorious deeds of valor and strength added more and more honor to your families and tribe. However, Stoick had always refused to celebrate happily with the rest of the village when skirmishes like this one happened. Today, as all times before, he mourned the loss of his villages. However, he also mourned the loss of one of his close friends and the loss of an entire family from the tribe, the Hoffersons were now



extinct.

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><p>Astrid finally took a deep breath after Hiccup had untied her. She was extremely grateful that he had rescued her, not that she would ever tell him that. Instead, she settled herself behind him and punched him in the arm. After hearing his shout of pain, "THAT was for letting me get captured!" She tried to sound angry with him.<p>

"I'm sorry, I was a little busy! I had to take out five different ships! Not to mention that I had to dodge crossbow bolts while flying throu-". Astrid couldn't take his rambling anymore and hugged him from behind, running her hand along his chest and laying her head against his back.

"This is for everything else." Astrid remembered the other times she had used this particular phrase and liked the effect it had on him. He shut up and she didn't have to act girly or anything. She was merely repaying a debt. Yeah, that was it. It was amid her myriad of thoughts that she heard a grunt of pain come from Hiccup. Sitting back up, she inspected him and saw the bolt in his leg. "Hiccup!" She moved her hand towards the bolt.

"Yeah, obviously didn't do too well on dodging, huh? Guess I got to work on that one. Toothless is hit too. I don't know if we can keep flying too much longer, but there is one more ship with a bell on it and I want to get rid of it before it decides to ring some more." Hiccup's voice wavered a little bit and Astrid could easily detect how tired he really was.

Astrid looked at the last ship curiously. It had peeled off from the others early on and headed for the cliffs instead of the docks. It was also travelling at an extremely slow pace. As they flew closer, they could hear shouts and see fighting on board. Maybe a mutiny? She continued to watch the ship until she recognized what was going on.

She gripped Hiccup extremely tight and pointed. "That's my dad! He's alive! We have to help him!" Astrid was in hysterics. Her father, who she was certain died at the very beginning of the fight, was fighting three berserker warriors with one hand! She felt so relieved and proud of him at that moment. It was ridiculous. Of course nothing could kill Angnir Hofferson! He was her dad!

Hiccup swung Toothless in low and shot a plasma blast at one of the berserkers, knocking him off the ship. Astrid made her move then and dropped off of the dragon's back and grabbed an axe that was laying on the deck and throwing it at one of the other warriors. He went down with a groan of pain and the last one was overpowered by Angnir as he clubbed him in the head with a piece of rigging from the ship.

"Dad!" Astrid started to make her way to Angnir when he turned and roared in rage at her. She faltered in her step. Finally getting a good look at him, she realized that he was in pretty rough shape. He still had the bastilla bolt through his right arm and it hung uselessly at his side. His body had numerous cuts and was bleeding pretty badly from the looks of it. He was covered in blood and seven

or eight crossbow bolts protruded from his chest and stomach. A sword was lodged in one of his legs and an axe was stuck in his shoulder. However, what scared her the most was his eyes. They were vacant and wide with rage.

Astrid had never saw her father look like that before. She was so shocked that she stopped her running towards him and started shaking her head. "No! No!" As a warrior, she knew that there was no recovering from the wounds that he had. No matter what Gothi did, he was too damaged. By all rights, he should already be dead by now. Still, he started a slow, but very aggressive walk towards her. His breathing was heavy and his blonde beard was covered in blood and saliva leaked out of his mouth.

"Dad! Oh gods, Dad! What are you doing?" Astrid was starting to back away. Angnir's labored breaths were starting to pick up and he was growling at her.

"Astrid! Get away from him! He's not himself!" Hiccup's voice sounded from behind her. He must have landed, because his voice was level with her on the longboat.

"He's hurt, Hiccup! He just needs to see Gothi! She can help him!" Astrid realized that her voice was more pleading than anything else. She had to believe that. It didn't matter what her warrior's sense told her. Gothi could save him! "Just calm down, Dad. Everything will be ok. We're going to take you to Gothi and she will heal you."

Angnir just seemed to get angrier and roared madly again before charging full tilt at her. "DAD! IT'S ME, ASTRID! YOUR DAUGHTER! LISTEN TO ME!" She screamed as loudly as she could, trying to get his attention. It didn't seem to work, though. He held up the piece of ship rigging above his head and jumped at her. "DAAAAD!"

Astrid closed her eyes and waited for the pain but it didn't come.

A strangled sound was heard from behind her and then something flew by her and the deck of the ship shook as something landed in front of her. Slowly, as if anticipating the strike to still happen, Astrid opened her eyes.

Lying in front of her was her father with a sword sticking out of his left shoulder and pinning him to the deck. His blood started to seep out from underneath the wound. "Father!" Astrid rushed over to him as he struggled, but his efforts got weaker and weaker, his energy leaving him, apparently.

The look of rage in his eyes started to fade and after blinking a few times, they refocused on her. "Astrid?" Angnir looked at her in confusion. "Wha-? URK!" His voice stopped as his eyes flew wide and he finally realized he was obviously injured.

Astrid's hands flew to his face, holding it tenderly and looking pleadingly into his eyes. "Dad! Look at me! It's alright! We're going to get you to Gothi! She will heal you, so look at me!" her voice was laced with desperation. Tears started to form in the crevices of her eyes.

Angnir just looked up at her. He smiled at her warmly and then with a grunt, moved his left hand to touch her face. "It's alright, Astrid. Odin calls me to Valhalla."

Fear throbbed in her chest. "NO! Not yet! You have to stay here with me! I can't lose you! Don't leave me, please!" She frantically hugged his neck as carefully as she could, crying. "Who is going to kill the things that make me cry? You can't die!"

Angnir chuckled underneath her. "I wish I could be with you to see how much more you'll grow, but I won't. You have to listen to me, Astrid. Everything you told me, everything that you want to tell me, everything that you are too proud or too scared to tell others, you have to tell Hiccup now. He's your husband and he will look after you now. You have to trust him, Astrid. He wants to help you, daughter, but you have to let him. For me, let him be there for you." \*Cough\* "There is so much more I want to tell you, but I guess the most important thing is all I can say." \*wheeze\* "No matter where I am, I will always love you, daughter. Remember that." Angnir let out a pained breath and spit up some blood on his beard.

Astrid started sobbing, her head buried in his chest, just above the crossbow bolts and below his chin. However, she heard him speak a little more. "Good throw, Hiccup. Thank you for saving my daughter. You take care of her, now. I'm leaving the most important thing in the world to me in your care, so you better make sure that she's happy, you hear me?" Astrid recognized his attempt to sound intimidating, but his breath rattled in his chest and his breath was coming in shorter and shorter gasps.

A small whisper, almost missed by Astrid, came to her as his last breath exited him. "Take care of each other." And with that, Angnir Hofferson, her father, died.

\*\*Ok, so I took some artistic license here with the draugr. I had planned the scene where they marched at the berserkers from the start of the story. However, I wanted to add a little to the myth of why draugr are so feared. I apologize if the battles were a little less aerobic than most, however, I wanted to keep this as a skirmish and not a one man battle. So I focused less on one person and more on the positions and actions of both the ships and troops. I plan to revisit the one man army writing style later, but I have a few things I have to do first. I hope that everyone enjoyed this chapter! My brother smacked me around a bit and told me to start posting quicker, so I'm going to try to pump out the next few chapters faster. I hope to see your thoughts and opinions of this story, though. So please review and tell me what you think! I want to make this as best as I can for you guys, but I sometimes need a little advice along the way to help me improve. Thanks again for your continued support!\*\*

### 13. Chapter 13

\*\*I'm so glad that everyone seemed to enjoy that last chapter! I was extremely worried that it lacked something pretty critical, but as it turned out (according to your reviews) it just needed an extra punch concerning the action scenes. I promise to work on that in the future, so please bear with me. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this next chapter\*\*

Numb. That was the best word to describe what he was right now. Hiccup sat atop Toothless with a look of horror and hopelessness. He remembered how hurt he was supposed to feel because of the bolt that he had broken in half earlier when he threw the sword Astrid gave him in their wedding at her father. He remembered how much anguish he had felt as soon as the handle of the blade left his hand. He had wanted so badly to take it back and somehow find a solution to all that had happened, but he didn't.

His eyes were not functioning properly as his vision blurred and started leaking tears down his cheeks. A pained moan came from below him, but he barely registered it. All of his focus was on the dead man that he had respected and come to love in the short time they spent together. He did this. He killed him. Astrid was still splayed out over his body, her body wracked with heavy sobs and her cries of pain and anguish had crushed him. The only word that she had been reduced to saying over and over again was, "Dad" and each time he had heard it, his gut churned with guilt and pain.

Astrid was crying. She was crying because of what he did. He had taken away her father right in front of her eyes. Oh, he had tried to tell himself that the only reason he had done it was to protect Astrid. That particular thought had given him at least the ability to function. However, a nagging thought at the back of his head continued to antagonize him. Angnir wouldn't have hurt Astrid. No matter how berserk he may have been, no matter how close it had come, he wouldn't have hurt his only blood relative. Hiccup had killed him to keep Astrid to himself.

It was that thought that had caused him to retreat into himself and all of his feelings had been shoved away to protect his mind. Slowly raising his head, Hiccup saw the slowly approaching cliffs and realized that the ship would soon crash into it. A quick check of the steering rudder showed him that it had been ripped off the ship and shoved into the gut of a berserker on deck. There was no way to steer it at all.

He slowly and mechanically unbuckled his safety tethers from Toothless and slid off of the saddle. When he landed, his right leg gave out underneath him and Toothless was the only thing that broke his fall. With his best friend's head underneath one arm, he slowly hobbled over to the still weeping Astrid. He reached his hand out to touch her shoulder, but stopped right before he grazed her clothing. She wouldn't want any comfort from the man that took her father away from her. Astrid had every right to blame him for everything that happened.

The promise he had made her of stopping the wedding had never been fulfilled and because of that, her father lay dead before them. Hiccup lowered his hand to his side and hung his head. He was still the village 'Hiccup' and the only difference now was that he was now responsible for killing people now instead of being a nuisance. A gentle nudge from Toothless snapped him out of his thoughts and he took two hobbled steps over to the right of Angnir.

He reached over and touched Astrid's hand. For a moment, she pulled away from him, but immediately after, she grabbed his hand in hers and gripped hard. It hurt his hand, but Hiccup suffered in silence and let her know that she wasn't alone. Soon, Astrid's tears began to falter and her grip tightened. Her breath came in hiccups between

wails of sorrow. It was then that Hiccup made his move. The ship was starting to get too close to the cliffs and he needed to get her out of there. Pulling on her hand, Hiccup gathered her into his arms and held her tight against him.

Arms tightened around him instantly and his shoulder became wet with tears. He moved with her to sit on Toothless's back and latched himself in. He went to turn away from the boat, but was stopped by a sudden wave of grief. It didn't go unnoticed by Toothless, who looked at him questioningly. "We can't leave him behind, bud. I know you're hurt, but can you carry him back with us?" His voice shook and he felt his chest tighten as his dragon turned and gathered Angnir in his claws before taking off.

As soon as they had left the ship, it crashed into the cliff and began to sink. Astrid was still inconsolable and gripping tightly to him as they slowly made their way back to Berk. The only thought that kept Hiccup's numb mind aware of anything was the constant beats of Toothless's wings and the soft cries next to his ear.

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><p>Gobber watched in amazement as he saw twelve draugr wrestling with three of their own kind. Hrothgar had yelled out a moment ago and it seemed that every draugr stopped their march towards the berserker armada and turned on themselves. Their blows shook the beach and sand flew everywhere. Stoick was on the other side of the fight, looking on in fear. He knew what was going on, by the looks of it. Well, if Stoick didn't like it, then he didn't either. So, he started to make his way to the nearest draugr being held down and gripped his hammer attachment in his other hand.<p>

These draugr were hard to kill, especially after what he saw the berserkers try to do to them. So, Gobber decided to get a little closer and try a few things. It was when he got close enough to hear their voices that he knew that he was in trouble. "No, brother! Don't listen to the war mind! It deceives you! These are your people! The people that you swore to protect! Calm down and let your anger fade!" The four draugr on top of the one were struggling to keep his arms and legs from moving. Their bodies sunk into the sand and their motions obviously carried a lot of strength behind them.

Unfortunately, the one draugr seemed enraged and would not stop trying to break free of their grip. He seemed to be failing until Gobber got close. Then, he roared in renewed fury and struggled even harder, throwing one of the draugr off of him and into the ocean. "Oh, that can't be good." Gobber took a small step back and watched as the other three draugr were thrown off as well. He swallowed heavily as the enraged draugr stood and turned to face him. "Now, you're going about this all wrong! You don't want to fight me!" Gobber took another step back.

The draugr howled at him and started to stagger to him. Gobber waited until it got pretty close. "Well, I tried to warn you." Gobber brought his hammer in front of him, at the ready. The draugr raised one of its hands and swung down at Gobber. He moved out of the way and watched as a pillar of sand raised from the ground where the creature had struck. "Beard of Thor, you're a strong one!" He ducked underneath another swing from the right, but it took his helmet off

in the process. Gobber brought his hammer up into the jaw of the draugr and watched its head snap back with a crack.

It turned towards him and jumped at him, but he sidestepped and used his hammer to hit the head again as hard as he would pound a weapon at the smithy. "Go to bed, you sack of bones!" Gobber brought his hammer down on top of it again and again until it stopped moving. "Is that it?" Gobber shrugged as if he was surprised that was all there was to it.

The other four came back and immediately jumped back on top of the other draugr. "You can't kill him, Viking. Only Hrothgar can stop him. It is the oath to him that keeps all of us here." A struggling voice came from one of them. Sure enough, the apparently dazed draugr came back to life and started to wriggle and writhe, trying to escape his captors again.

"Right, soooâ€¦.ok. I'm going to talk to the chief." Gobber left there and tried to find Stoick. He spotted his friend leaping from the flagship of the berserker fleet with a sword. "Oi! Stoick! What are we going to do about these beasties?"

Stoick stopped for a second before motioning for Gobber to follow him. "Unless we build a doom door, we have to let Hrothgar the Bold stop them. He asked for me to fetch his sword, so we'll see what happens.

Gobber nodded his head as if understanding. "Alright, that makes sense. So should I start getting the stone for that door now or after this doesn't work?"

Stoick chuckled at his friend. "No. I trust a chief of Berk. He said it would work, so it will. After all, his job is to look after the people of Berk. Just like mine is." They both reached Hrothgar, who stood in front of one group of draugr.

"Thank you, Chief Stoick. Please leave this beach and stand at the ready in case something happens. I'll handle it from here." Hrothgar took his sword and motioned one arm in the direction of the village, which was now being guarded by a few dragons and their riders.

Gobber grunted. "Right! We'll be over that way!" He walked over there with Stoick, then turned to see what happened.

Hrothgar raised his sword in one hand. "When life was still within you, all of you made an oath to follow me! You have done so, but on this iron of the bands we once wore, I release you from your oaths. Your vows have been fulfilled. Bravely, you have all fought with me to defend Berk from invaders and as such, your word has been kept. I release you! Join the gods in Valhalla!" Hrothgar's blade glowed and glowing armbands appeared around one arm of each draugr. Hrothgar swept his blade down in a grand arc and every armband shattered. Everything stilled.

As one, the draugr fell to bones and dust on the beach until only Hrothgar stood. Finally, the old chief trudged over to Stoick. "Give this to your son, Stoick. He has saved not only all of Berk, but all of us as well. We were cursed by the village for bringing our people into a land where our greatest enemy fought and killed us like sheep.

It is through your son that that once savage enemy is now our people's allies. He gave me and my warriors a chance to redeem ourselves and show ourselves worthy to eat in the halls of Valhalla. Through him, I can finally see my people once again. I will wait for you and him in Valhalla and tell everyone there what a great place Berk has become under your leadership." He handed Stoick his blade, then took a couple steps back.

Then, as if the wind was waiting for the old chief to finish, it blew and Hrothgar went with it. His bones fell down to the beach and dust flew off in the wind. Gobber went to talk, but got a mouthful of dust. "Blegh! That's nasty!" Gobber used his one hand to start wiping his tongue off and sputtered trying to rid his mouth of the foul taste.

Stoick started laughing at Gobber. "I told you that your mouth would get you in trouble one day. I just didn't think it would be like this!"

"Oh, you think it's funny, do you? Well, why don't you try some!" Gobber knelt next to the bones of Hrothgar and threw some of the dust at Stoick who was still laughing. It got in his mouth and he started to sputter and do the same thing as Gobber. "See! Not so funny when YOU are eating dead people! Waitâ€| that didn't sound right."

"GOBBER!" Stoick had his chief face on and Gobber looked at him, then to the forge.

"Well, would you look at the time! I have to start doing repairs! Got to go, Stoick!" He ran off toward the forge, laughing all the way.

\* \* \*

><p>Crying had to be the absolute worst thing that a Viking could do. Unfortunately, that seemed all that she had been doing recently. From one scenario to the next, without rest and she was tired of it. So tired. She didn't remember how she had gotten back to her house, much less back to Berk. She was disoriented when she opened her crusted eyes and saw her own ceiling and Stormfly huddled around her bed.<p>

For a moment, she thought that everything that had happened was all a bad dream and she would hear her father's booming laugh from downstairs. That was until she saw Hiccup sitting on the floor with is back to the wall, asleep. His right leg had a bandage around it and a crutch was lying next to him on the floor. The sound of his steady breathing and slightly drooped head told her that he was still asleep.

Pain raced through her chest at the sudden realization that everything was all too real. Stormfly must have picked up on it, because she curled tighter around her and cooed soothingly at Astrid while nudging her chest affectionately. Astrid slowly reached around her head and hugged her as best she could. Her heart and head both ached. In fact, her entire body seemed to be sore.

It hurt to think, it hurt to move, it even hurt to stay still. The only thing that kept her from crying out in frustration was the sleeping form of Hiccup. She knew how tired he must be and looked at

his leg. He had gotten wounded and yet he didn't pay any attention to it earlier. It was a vast change from when he used to whine and complain about her punching him in the arm. Weird didn't begin to describe what she felt over Hiccup right now. She was so angry at him, yet she couldn't help but feel compassionate as well. He had saved her earlier in the day, doing his level best to be there for her when she needed it, then in the same hour, turned around and killed her father.

The sudden burst of anger towards him surprised even herself. She knew that he was doing his best to be a good friend, if nothing else. After watching him closely for the past couple of weeks, she had determined one thing about Hiccup. He did his best to look out for his friends and family, dragons included. He was a genuinely good guy and Berk was lucky to have him as the next chief when the time came.

However, it was all because of him that she was in her current predicament. She was married to him even though he said he would stop it. But she didn't blame him for that. Everything concerning the wedding was out of his hands as well. Still, he could have done something else, something more. If they were not married, her father would still be alive. Hiccup himself killed her father, she knew. Even that couldn't be seen as Hiccup's fault, though. He protected her. Her dad even thanked him for it. So she couldn't hate him for that.

But she was so angry! She HAD to hate something. Everything that she went through, everything that happened had to be reconciled somehow! She couldn't just sit by and let everything go. It was just something that she had to be active about. Surely there was something that she could do to make everything better? Or something to receive her anger, her hurt, and her confusion.

Stormfly chirped a little and Astrid started to absently scratch her chin. She needed her axe. It had been left in her room until the wedding was over. Looking around, she saw that Hiccup was right next to it and that he was slowly starting to wake up. She cursed her luck silently and watched as he first groaned, then slowly raised his head to look at her. When she saw his eyes, her anger was quelled a little. He looked so haunted. His eyes wore black bags underneath them and his green colored eyes looked faded and pale with sadness. All in all, Hiccup didn't look like Hiccup.

"You're up. How are you feeling?" He grunted as he used his crutch to help him stand.

"Why would you care?" Astrid flinched a little at her own response. She hadn't meant to say that. The words left her mouth before she thought. It was the flinch of pain and anguish that flashed across his face that made her truly regret those words.

Hiccup sighed heavily. "You're right. I'm probably the last person you want to see right now. I shouldn't have stayed in your room. I'm sorry." Hiccup started to turn towards her door.

"No! Don'tâ€¦don't leave me tooâ€¦" Astrid's voice got smaller and smaller as she continued. Panic started to swirl in her chest. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that." She may be angry, but more than that, she didn't want to be alone. Her eyes had moved to watch her



hands clench around her blankets when she saw another pair of hands cover her own.

"It's okay, Astrid. I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here as long as you want me to." Hiccup's hands were cold and she could feel the pain that he was going through right now. She wasn't the only one suffering. Stormfly cooed at them and moved her head to nuzzle Hiccup.

Astrid clenched her hands tighter. Something inside of her both appreciated Hiccup's help and thought that it was wrong. Take care of each other. Her father's final words echoed in the back of her mind. She would do her best to follow his advice. So, Astrid let go of the blanket and grasped Hiccup's hands instead. It was her silent way of saying thank you, even though she couldn't voice it.

His grip tightened around hers as well and he shifted a little on the bed, trying to get comfortable. Astrid saw that his leg was still bothering him a little. "How is your leg?"

Hiccup grimaced a little. "Well, Gothi fixed it as best she could. Apparently, taking a bolt to the leg is better than an arrow. They gave me this crutch and then said to stay off of it for the next few days. Dad about had a fit after I showed up." His voice trailed off as if he was saying something wrong.

"How long have I been asleep?" Astrid let go of his hands and instead started scratching Stormfly again. She had to do something with them and if Stormfly's contented growls was anything to go by, she was at least doing something right with them.

"Not long. Maybe four hours." Hiccup kept his reply short, she noticed.

"What aboutâ€¦|what about my father?" Astrid felt her gut clench, but she had to know.

Hiccup sighed again, but answered anyway. "Heâ€¦|The village is building a boat now. Gothi and the chief took care of him as soon as we landed. When the boat is doneâ€¦|we willâ€¦|yeah." His eyes were downcast and his demeanor sank. Astrid nodded her head. She understood what he was saying. A true Viking burial. Hiccup stood up slowly and leaned on his crutch. "Let me bring you something to eat. I stopped by the great hall before I came back here. I hope you are in the mood for trout." Hiccup chuckled nervously and shuffled to the door.

"Thank you, Hiccup. For everything." Astrid tried her best to convey her heartfelt feelings toward him. He had obviously done so much for her and injured no less.

"No problem." Then in a smaller, yet infinitely more meaningful tone, "After all, it's my job to watch out for you." And then he left.

She didn't know what to think about that. For as long as she could remember, she had worked tirelessly to be independent. Yet, hearing Hiccup say that made her a little happy. Not that she would ever tell him that, of course. Shaking her head, Astrid stopped that line of thinking. There were more important things that she had to focus on.

Life as she had known it had changed so drastically and so fast that she really had no time to take everything in now. She looked down at the silver ring on her left hand. She was married now. No, she was married to Hiccup now. Her new name was Astrid Haddock. No more tales of the fearless Astrid Hofferson for her. Now all her glory would be tied to the Haddock house and be overshadowed by Hiccup's stories.

Anger swelled up inside of her again, but this time she wondered how fast it seemed to come to her. Lately, she had been like an open wound. Everything that had happened had left her reeling and either crying or fighting with herself. In the past week, she had cried more than she would care to remember and been angry the rest of the time. She gave up trying to decipher what she truly felt. Everything was too much for her to take right now. So she resolved to just think from day to day and not delve too deeply into her own mangled emotions.

It was in the middle of her musings that Hiccup knocked on her door again and hobbled in carrying a plate of trout for her in one hand and gripping his crutch in another. "Here is your trout. I got a basket of fish outside for you too, Stormfly." Her dragon looked at Hiccup, then back to Astrid before squawking and slowly going to the window, but stopping to look back at Astrid.

"Go on, girl. Get something to eat." Astrid smiled and shooed her out the window from her bed. Stormfly turned and jumped out the roof entrance, following her rider's orders.

Hiccup moved over to her and placed the plate on the bed next to her. "Eat up. I tried to snatch the best, but it's hard to beat the line when you have two bum legs." Hiccup motioned to his feet, one a metal peg leg and the other wrapped in bandages.

She scoffed and pointed at the trout. "As long as this didn't come off of Snotlout's plate, I don't care."

A smile reached its way to Hiccup's face before it disappeared quickly. "I wouldn't wish that on anyone." He shivered for dramatic effect then stayed still and turned away from her, as if avoiding her eyes.

Astrid had picked up a trout when she noticed the way he was acting. "What are you thinking about, Hiccup?"

His back stiffened at her words. "No-nothing!" He turned to meet her eyes, but his shifted away after a couple of seconds.

Putting down the trout, Astrid pushed the plate back at him. "You are going to tell me or I will start pulling teeth." Then she glared at him meaningfully.

With another sigh, he looked back at her. "I had to have a talk with my dad. He wanted to know where we are going to live. Usually, you would join us in our hall or we would build another house, but—" His gaze shifted off to the left.

"With my house now empty, he wanted to know if we were going to live here." It wasn't a question. Astrid knew what he was saying.

"I didn't want to ask you so soon afterâ€¦ wellâ€¦ all that's happened, but the next time I see dad, I have to tell him what our decision is. I just need to know what you want to do."

Her appetite was gone now. She had already lost so much, she was slowly losing herself, her own identity was changing and she had no idea how to stop it from slipping away. This house was all that kept her together. Being here made her feel safe, even if one of the best things about it was now gone, she couldn't lose this as well. But she couldn't tell Hiccup that. It was too personal, too important to her.

Everything you told me, everything that you want to tell me, everything that you are too proud or too scared to tell others, you have to tell Hiccup now. His voice reverberated in her mind. So intense was it that she almost looked around to find where it came from. Then her eyes settled back on Hiccup's. His were full of fear and still soaked in sadness. There was something else in his eyes that she had a really hard time understanding. It wasn't physical pain that tormented him. He was hurting because she was.

That discovery shook her, badly. She wasn't going to cry, she had done far enough of that recently, but it caused her to finally understand her father's words. Hiccup wanted to help her, to shoulder her pain and make it bearable. She owed it to him to be truthful, at least about this. So with as much courage as she could muster, she spoke her mind. "Can we stay here? This house is all I have left. Everything that I have ever known, ever wanted to know of living in a household is all here. Living with the chief would be an honor, but I want to stay here."

No sooner had they left her mouth, then she knew that she had made the right decision. Hiccup's eyes lit up a little and a small smile made its way to his eyes. "If that is how you feel, then we'll stay here. I'll go tell my dad as soon as I see him." He pushed her plate back to her. "Now eat up. The day is almost over and we still have a lot to do."

Astrid looked back at him and wondered, not for the first time, what he was thinking. Something was wrong with Hiccup, but then again, something was wrong with her as well. She was just about to ask him when he stood up and made his way to the door. "I have to go check on Toothless now. I'll be downstairs if you need me." And with that, he walked out the door, leaving Astrid with a nagging thought that she just missed something important.

\*\*Alright, sort of a set up chapter this time around. Tying up loose ends and all, but necessary nonetheless. I wanted to get this chapter out as fast as possible because it is a bit slower than the others. I appreciate all the reviews that I have gotten so far! I'm doing my best to try and upload faster, but I can't make any promises as life has a way of getting in the way. Still, I really lean on the support all you guys give me! Thank you so much for all your kind words and help along the way! I hope you continue to tell me what you think as we continue on! I'll see you next chapter!\*\*

\*\*So here is the next installation of Peculiarities of Love! To answer some questions real quick: I have had one heck of a life change recently and it has delayed my writing. I am now in a different area, looking for a job, and barely making it with antivirus software to keep my files intact. It has been one long wait, but I finally sat down and almost literally super glued my butt to my chair to write this. But, I digress. I hope you enjoy this chapter.\*\*

Hiccup sat at the table downstairs, leaned back against a heavy chair. His breath left him in a tremendous sigh as his head drooped down to the table. Toothless was curled up behind him and already asleep. His wing had been bandaged up and stood out in stark contrast to his black scales.

It really wasn't fair that Vikings thought that Toothless needed to drink large amounts of mead before they removed the bolt from his wing and Hiccup himself just had a few grown men hold him down. Gobber had laughed at him when he commented on it earlier and simply said that he wasn't afraid of Hiccup blasting down the building if things got out of hand.

Getting a drunk dragon to move over to the Hofferson hall had been no easy task. Toothless was convinced that he had only two legs and insisted on trying to walk on only his front legs, dragging his back ones in the dirt along the way. After finally getting him into the hall, Hiccup took him to the least likely place to catch fire and let him curl up to sleep.

When that particular hurdle had ended, Hiccup had been so tired that he almost fell asleep with Toothless on the floor, but remembered that Astrid had fallen asleep against him on the way home. So he dragged himself up the stairs to make sure she was alright. Stormfly was with her and he really shouldn't have worried, but seeing Astrid so vulnerable and knowing that HE had been the cause of her distress made him feel responsible for her current condition. After finally checking in on her, he was so exhausted that he just slumped against the wall and fell asleep. That was how Astrid found him when she woke up.

Things had been much easier before all this mess even started. His friendship with Astrid was so easy that it was laughable at how common it was to slip into easy conversation. Now, forced into something neither of them were ready for, even talking to one another felt so awkward and formal. Like an important cornerstone of their relationship had been replaced with expectations and social standing. He absolutely hated it.

His hand curled into a fist as he looked at it. An absurd and ridiculous thought of just lopping off his hand and making everyone better jumped into his head. Hey, it worked with his leg. Hiccup squashed that stupid idea and instead turned his view to look somewhere besides at himself. Very seldom had he been in Astrid's home before and when he was, he didn't really take the time to look around.

It was when he looked above the fire pit that he noticed a recent addition to the house that he could not have seen before. The picture that he had drew for Astrid with her father's help sat on a shelf that seemed totally out of place and looked like the only reason that

it was constructed was to support the picture itself. He remembered how difficult it had been to draw that picture at the directions of Angnir alone. It was the first time that he had drawn something from someone else's mind instead of his own.

That mind was dead now. Hiccup tore his eyes from the picture as another wave of guilt flooded over him. He dreaded going to the funeral today. Sometimes being a Viking had some drawbacks and today Hiccup had realized that one of them included impatience and superstition. His father had been quite clear that the funeral had to be today and Gobber had agreed with him wholeheartedly.

Of course no one would think about how hard it would be for Astrid to get married, lose her father, and then have his funeral all on the same day. It made him angry at his tribe for the very first time in his life. He was no better, either. It was by his hand that Angnir had died and it was his life that he had tied Astrid down to for the rest of hers.

He had fought hard for his people and the dragons. Why was fighting for happiness so much harder? Hiccup looked down from the drawing and looked at his once best tunic. He would have to change his shirt at least before attending the funeral.

The soft footfalls coming from the stairs caught his attention as he watched Astrid come down and look at him with her brow furrowed in concentration. She had the plate of trout that he carried up to her in her hands as she moved toward the table. "Hiccup, why is Toothless in the kitchen?"

Hiccup sighed, but answered her. "It looked like the least flammable part of your house." Astrid looked at him in confusion and waited for him to explain further. "Long story short, he's drunk and here seemed the best place to let him fall asleep where everything is less likely to catch fire."

She shook her head and set her plate down on the table and then took a shaky breath. "Hiccup, has the chief said exactly when the funeral would be today?"

"No, he hasn't. I wasn't exactly allowed to stick around while I was bleeding out. But I'll make sure to ask him here in a bit. Everyone is helping to build the boat as quickly as possible, so I want to do what I can to help." Hiccup kept his answer guarded, but truthful. He felt that she deserved that at least.

She took another breath, then nodded. After that, she purposefully moved closer to him. "Hiccup, we need to talk." The implications hit him so hard that he almost sat down on the spot from the unexpected change of topic.

"Wha-what!? Where did that come from?" Hiccup firmly grasped the crutch under his right arm, trying to take support from it as best he could.

"Everyone wanted us to get married. We did, but now I don't know what to do. All this time, I was thinking about how I was going to get through this stupid thing and I didn't even think about what was going to happen after." Astrid seemed to sigh as her breath left her in a rush.

"Hey, I didn't even think I'd get this far. I was sure that I'd screw something up again." Hiccup was rooted to the spot, seeing Astrid struggle with whatever she wanted to say.

"We talked a little about how this marriage thing was going to work, but I wanted to lay down a few rules." Astrid was shifting back and forth on her feet.

Hiccup knew why she was both so determined to talk to him and still reluctant to do so. "Good idea. Yeah, let's do that. I have no idea what I'm doing, so a little direction would be great."

"I've never done this either, Hiccup." Astrid looked at him pointedly.

"Right. Why would you- You know what? Go ahead. Rules." Hiccup berated himself for stating the obvious, but tried to stop as quickly as he could.

"First off, hands off. You touch me, I take a hand, got it?" Astrid raised one of her eyebrows at him. With an audible gulp, Hiccup nodded quickly. "Second, I'm not going to cook or do your laundry. Good little housewives are not something I aspire to be. Third, you are not sleeping in my room at all. You stay down here in the bedroom on the first floor. You got all that?"

Hiccup felt a little like an intruder instead of a husband, truth be told. True, he didn't expect Astrid to hang all over him, but he had hoped for a little more warm reception than what he was being told he would get. He caught himself from thinking any further down that path of thought. He was married to Astrid. Against her will and right after she just lost her father. Of course she wanted to protect herself. Vikings did not accept change very well, the dragon war for the past few centuries proved that.

There was little Hiccup could do to change her mind, so he just nodded his head and accepted what she wanted. \_Take care of each other.\_ A haunting thought jarred his thoughts once again and forced him to step outside his comfort zone again. "Alright, but I have a few rules of my own."

Astrid looked at him a little hesitantly, but nodded for him to continue. "If this is going to work, I need you to talk to me. We are still good friends and I want to be there when you need me." Astrid looked a little uncomfortable, but nodded regardless. "I want to make you happy, Astrid. I promised your father that I would look after you and I intend to keep it. I have no idea what I'm doing when it comes to marriage, but I'm hoping we can learn it together." Hiccup slouched a little, but continued.

"You told me before that you were happy that it was me that you were marrying and not someone else. I feel the same way, Astrid. I feel guilty that I'm enjoying the thought of spending the rest of my life with you. I don't expect you to do anything you don't want to. That's why I want you to have this."

Hiccup reached into his pocket and pulled out another ring. "This is the wedding ring that you never got to put on me. When we got married, we didn't have a choice. So I want to give you one right

now. This ring will be your choice." Hiccup reached over and placed it in her hand. "Hold onto that ring until you feel like it is time to give it back to me. Until then, we will be friends and nothing else. You are not cornered, Astrid."

Astrid looked at the ring, then back to Hiccup. Her eyes shifted back and forth from the two a couple of times before she closed her hand and then took a step towards him. She pulled back her fist and lightly punched him in the arm. "Idiot." Then, she hugged him with both her arms tightening around him. "Thank you."

He expected it to be short, but was surprised that she hadn't moved after a few seconds. If anything, she was holding him tighter. She wasn't crying, but he could tell that she was struggling not to. So he did what he thought was best and dropped his crutch to steady her as much as he could with both arms. They stayed like that for a few precious moments before she slowly pulled away. Then she bent over and picked up the crutch that he let fall to the floor.

"Let's go see what we can do to help." Astrid looked up at him as she handed his crutch back and smiled at him.

"Yeah, let's go." Hiccup grabbed the crutch and started to hobble outside when he felt a warmth engulf his other hand. He looked down and saw Astrid holding it. After she shut the door behind them, she didn't even look at him. She just faced forward and continued walking, but she kept a firm grip on his hand. Hiccup thought that maybe, just maybe, there was hope for them yetâ€|

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><p>Stoick heaved mightily as he helped set the mast into the boat. The woodwork was done and now all that was left was the passenger. He was glad that the village all felt it necessary to hurry in making the boat. No one but Angnir lost their life and they all felt responsible for that. While they were out in the water, trying to stay alive, he was out fighting on the ships that were threatening their homes. Angnir would be remembered as a hero, he was sure of it.<p>

When Gothi had first come to him and instructed him to build the boat and send Angnir on his journey to Valhalla immediately after the attack, he was surprised and confused. However, when the village elder gives you a clear instruction on what the spirits want, you listen. He felt bad for Hiccup and Astrid, though. Today was supposed to be the day that his son got married, not lose another family member he just got.

A heavy sigh was heard right next to him as Gobber leaned up against the stone wall right next to him. "Well, I'll say this much, that's the fastest we've ever built a boat before." Gobber started to pick his teeth with his claw hand.

"Aye, it is. You heard what the elder said. We have to have the funeral today. And that means a boat." With a heavy sigh, Stoick slumped against the wall next to Gobber. "I just don't understand why it had to be today. It was going to be such a good day."

Stoic felt Gobber prod him in the gut quickly. "It still might. You seeing what I'm seeing?" He then nodded toward the village. Stoick

looked up and saw Hiccup and Astrid walking down towards the boat. Hiccup had his crutch and hobbled about slowly, but Astrid kept his pace and didn't run off without him. However, it was the sight of the two holding hands that made Stoick smile.

Stoick looked back at Gobber and saw a smug smile adorning his face. "Well, it certainly makes it better than before." He then got up and went to greet his son and new daughter in law. When he got closer, he saw Astrid release Hiccup's hand and then stand next to him.

"Hey, dad. Is there anything we can do to help?" Hiccup seemed a bit pale, but otherwise looked alright.

"Son! We just finished building the boat. The others are gathering shields and decorations for it now. If you two want to go grab a few, we could put them on it here soon. We have to cast it off in the next couple of hours while we still have the daylight." Stoick couldn't help but smile. He knew that he shouldn't be smiling due to what was happening, but he couldn't contain himself much longer.

"Have you two decided on where you're staying?" Gobber butted in.

"Yeah, we are going to stay at the Hofferson hall. We thought that it would be a waste to let the hall go unused." Hiccup answered.

"What about you, Astrid. Are you doing well?" Stoick looked at her and watched her straighten her back.

"Yes, chief. I'm fine." It was all that he got out of her, but he was satisfied with it. After all, she was the strongest Viking of her generation—aside from his son, of course.

"Well, if you're going to get what you need for the boat, you had better hurry. We are going to go look for some ourselves. Make sure you are back before dark." Stoick took a step back, then turned to Gobber. "Don't you have some spare shields in the forge?"

"Aye, that I do!" Gobber picked up the hint and started to hobble off. Stoick spared one more glance at the now departing couple, seeing their hands locked once more. Yes, there may be some hope yet. "Are you going to let a onelegged Viking beat you up to the forge? Some chief you are!" Gobber hollered at him.

Stoick sighed, but started up towards Gobber. "Gobber, the forge is the other way."

Gobber stopped, then turned around. "Right, I knew that. What are you waiting for? Hurry up or I'll leave you behind!" Stoick sighed, but trudged after his best friend.

\*\*Sorry again guys, I was gone for a bit too long. Not a lot is happening yet, but I wanted to focus more on Hiccup and Astrid for right now and how their feelings are progressing. I want to thank everyone who faithfully kept telling me to write some more. I plan on releasing the next chapter within a week now that I have my laptop back in running condition. Thank you again for all your support!\*\*



## 15. Chapter 15

**\*\*I wanted to give this chapter to you earlier, but it just didn't work out that way. I want to tell you what happened, so if you are interested, please check after the story to hear what I have to say. So, to keep you from waiting even longer, please enjoy this chapter.\*\***

The funeral started with a sudden quietness that even the dragons seemed to understand. Astrid stood alone at the boat that her father would be using to reach Valhalla. She flinched a little as the doors opened with a creak at Gothi's hall. In a slow march, Angnir was carried upon a wooden stretcher by Gobber, Stoick, Spitelout, and finally Hiccup. She cringed as she saw him struggle without his crutch.

When the topic had come up on who should carry Angnir, Hiccup was adamant that he help. He was not present when Astrid had went through her father's belongings and sent them to the boat earlier. Instead, he was at the forge helping Gobber collect shields and weapons. Hiccup had stood and told his father that he was going to at least carry Angnir as far as was needed. She had told him that he still had to use his crutch in order to walk, but that only made it worse. He grit his teeth and dropped the crutch in front of her. "If all it takes is a little pain to pay my respects to him, then I will walk without it. Now, does anyone else have any other reasons why I shouldn't honor my father in law?"

It was so unlike Hiccup to reprimand anyone that it literally kept everyone from speaking. Shock had settled over the group around him and he just nodded and then limped away. Stoic stood completely still and then nodded as if accepting his son's words. Astrid had made to follow him, but as soon as she had left to find him, she was spirited away by the women of the village who were helping decorate the ship. She had spent the rest of her time perfecting everything on board and wondering where Hiccup had run off to.

Seeing him now made her both proud and worried about him. He was in front of Gobber and across from Stoick. His limp was still noticeable, but he never let it jar the stretcher that carried her father. It was a short walk from the elder's house to the docks, but by the time that Angnir had been placed on the ship by the Vikings, Hiccup's leg was covered in blood and he moved slower returning to her side. She felt his hand shakily find hers and then squeeze it as they both stood perfectly still to listen to Stoick.

"May the Valkyries welcome you and lead you through Odin's great battlefield. May they sing your name with love and fury, so that we might hear it rise from the depths of Valhalla and know that you've taken your rightful place at the table of kings. For a great man has fallen: A warrior. A father. A friend." Stoick shifted from one foot to another, pain lacing his eyes as he slowly took in a couple deep breaths.

He motioned at the boat for the sail to be lowered. Slowly, the wind carried Angnir out toward the ocean. A small fire was started at the dock when Astrid felt her breath catch in her throat. Hiccup must have heard her because his hand tightened around hers. A wave of relief swelled from her hand and soothed her mind. She wasn't alone in this. Hiccup was right next to her. A small part of her felt

guilty for thinking more about Hiccup than her father right now, but it was easier for her to accept her father's death with the comfort of knowing that Hiccup was there with her.

With a slow and measured breath, Astrid gathered her courage and set her jaw. She slowly released Hiccup's hand and strode forward to where the bows were placed next to the small fire. Lowering the arrow that was with the bow, she let the tip catch fire before she turned to the ship that was easily within range. The bow and arrow rested heavily in her hands. After standing still for a few moments, she heard others line up next to her, their own bows at the ready. She was tempted to look at Hiccup again, but resolutely set her eyes on the boat that was slowly becoming harder and harder to hit. It was up to her to release the first shot and it would be the fire that she started that would take her father to Valhalla. Pulling the bow taught and taking precise aim, she felt the unfamiliar weight of a silver ring hanging from her neck. It reminded her of her father's last wish and it steadied her hands as she aimed her own farewell.

The arrow was released from the bow as it sailed over the water and lit the way with the burning tip. Other arrows were released after hers and the stream of fire that sped toward Angnir lit up the night. Finally, her arrow hit the boat and the others did as well. Flames started to lick the wood and spread into a roaring fire. Astrid put down her bow and watched everything. She felt Hiccup standing to her right, so she moved closer to him and grasped his hand in hers. Feeling strength flood her again, Astrid waited until most of the village had left for the great hall. There, stories of Angnir and his exploits would be told until the mead overtook tongues and rendered them incapable of speech. Still, she did not move. Even after the boat sank and the fire went out, Astrid stood and looked out across the sea.

Her hand never left Hiccup's, but she didn't cry. No, she was beyond that. Finally, she tore her stare away from the sea and looked at Hiccup. He was already looking at her, his eyes meeting hers as if trying to comfort her with just a look. His green eyes filled her vision and made her stop for a second. Whatever she was thinking, it took a back seat to his eyes. The pain, guilt and longing that she saw there mirrored her own. After staring for a bit, she realized what she was doing and immediately looked away. Vikings don't get to be nice and gentle or sad and depressed. They got angry. Astrid felt like she was betraying everything that her father taught her because she just couldn't muster up the anger she knew she was supposed to feel.

Standing there with Hiccup and holding his hand was the thing that kept her from crying. Of course she was sad, but the pain seemed to be a bit more bearable as long as she held his hand. She was snapped out of her reverie through Hiccup's voice. "Come on, let's go to the great hall. I think if anyone should be telling stories about your dad, it would be you." His hand clenched around hers and he started to hobble a little as he pulled her along.

Astrid saw that he was still in pain and his pants had been soaked through with his blood. He wasn't seriously thinking about going to the great hall like that, was he? Deciding that she would rather not find out, she moved forward and then swung underneath his arm, helping him walk. Hiccup stopped in surprise at first, but he slumped

into her a little more after she started to walk them away from the great hall and toward their new house.

"Storytelling can wait. I don't think that anyone would appreciate cleaning up all the blood that you'd tread all over the place." She jostled him a bit more when he went to make a remark, eliciting a yelp out of him instead of speech. Then, she looked pointedly at him as if challenging him to say something. Luckily for him, he chose to keep his mouth shut instead.

The rest of the trip back to their house was quiet. Astrid opened the door and sat Hiccup down at the table. Toothless had not moved from his napping place and continued to snore heavily. "Stay here, I'll go get some more bandages." Astrid reluctantly let go of him as she made to leave him.

"What? Why would I do that? I really wanted to go running around the village as fast as I could. Party pooper." Hiccup fake pouted and then nervously smirked at her.

Astrid stopped moving to turn and look at his nervous smirk. He had absolutely no idea what he looked like right now. Still, something about his nervous smile made her feel happy. Something about him just being there made her happy. It shocked her that she could muster up the feelings to be happy, especially at a time like this. So, she just shook her head and went into the living area where she kept her own bandages.

As she bent over to pick them up, her necklace with the silver ring fell into her vision. It brought Hiccup's earlier statement come to mind. "This ring will be your choice." His serious expression and his words had lifted her spirits and made her realize how good he was trying to be to her. This was her choice, no matter what the world threw at her, she had at least one choice. She shook her head and picked up the bandages. No, she had more than one choice. She could be sad and cry or she could accept what had happened and live her life to honor her father.

Granted, it wasn't a sudden epiphany. The entire afternoon while she was picking through her father's prized possessions, she had remembered all the things that they had done together. Those memories made her sad at first, but with each new prized axe or blade, she relived all the happy times she spent with him and the lessons he tried to teach her. He had said that he never wanted to see her cry, so she resolved herself to keep from doing so, at least for him. She made that choice. Only realizing that now, she went back into the kitchen and saw Hiccup with his legging rolled up and undoing the soiled bandage. Yes, it was her choice to be happy and although it might have been the last lesson her father would inadvertently teach her, she learned from him and Hiccup both.

Hiccup turned his attention to her as he finished. It was a small wound, but deep. It was bleeding, but not excessively. Astrid knelt down and started to wrap it again. "This is what you've been whining about this whole time? It doesn't even look like it will scar." She playfully taunted him.

"Hey, that's all Gothi's fault! I can't help it if she sowed it up so well!" He indignantly winced.

"Yeah, it's only fun if you get a scar out of it, right?" Astrid continued to try and distract him while she started to tie the bandage.

Hiccup lifted his other leg up and wiggled it next to her. "I already got one awesome battle scar. I think I've had enough fun for a while." He chuckled a bit and then got quiet as she stood up, finally finished.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup was a little dazed, but a constant throbbing in his leg continued to keep him convinced that this wasn't some crazy dream. It was funny how his entire plan had been reduced to trying to put one foot in front of the other. Astrid had taken top priority for the time being. It wasn't really surprising how much he wanted to spend with her, but it was a bit unexpected how easy it was now. He was a walking mess of nerves and accident, but now it seemed like they were starting to fall back into the friendship they had before.<p>

Astrid stopped in front of him and just looked at him. She seemed to be waiting for something and when Hiccup's mind finally decided to find its way back to the present, he nearly jumped at seeing her in front of him. Realizing that she was probably waiting on him to stand up, he nervously chuckled and used the table to help him up. When he finally got completely vertical, Astrid seemed to nod to herself. "Well, let's get going to the great hall!" He started to turn and get his crutch, which he had left back with Toothless, when he felt Astrid slip underneath his arm and grasp him around his waist. "Uhhâ€| ahhâ€|A-Astrid?" His stutter came back. Didn't she say that she would take his hand off if he touched her?

"Leave it. It's my job to look after you, not some stick's." She didn't look at him, but he could see the faintest hue of red spread across her cheeks.

"O-Okay. If that's what you want." He leaned on her a little and she helped him through the door. She seemed determined to keep her eyes forward and move at a crawling pace. He was grateful for the slow pace, but he realized that it was nothing compared to their trek back to the Hofferson hall. Something must be on her mind.

It must have been the pain that was racing up his leg that loosened his lips. "Astrid, do you want to go to the great hall?" She stopped walking and they both stood still just a few steps away from the cobblestone that led the way up toward the celebrating Vikings in the great hall. She didn't look at him and when she tried to speak, she stopped before her voice reached her lips. She seemed to be debating something inside herself, so Hiccup tried to help her along a bit more. "What is it, Astrid?"

Astrid's body seemed to deflate a little before she spoke. "It's expected of us to be there. He was my father." Her voice was strained and a little forced. Hiccup felt like she wasn't telling him something, something important, so he pushed just a tad more.

"Yeah, but that's not what I asked. So let me try again. Astrid, do you want to go to the great hall?" He watched as she resolutely turned to him.

"I-Iâ€¦ no. It's justâ€¦ everybody will talk about my father as if they all knew him as well as I did. All the adventures he went on and all that he accomplished. They will say of how brave or how great a warrior he was. It's nothing that I haven't heard before, but they won't tell it like he did. They won't say the important things that he felt or his reasons. And I- I don't want to just sit there and listen to them becauseâ€¦ because I don't want to share him with them!" She was getting angry, Hiccup could tell.

"But if I don't go, it will look bad upon him. His own daughter doesn't even show up to tell everyone his story." She finally finished. Her rage had built and Hiccup had seen enough of it to know that somebody was going to be hitâ€¦ most likely him.

Then, an idea dawned on him. He smiled a bit, then looked back at her, watching as her anger turned to confusion at his smile. "Then let's not go." He tugged at her shoulders a bit, trying to lead her toward the woods, taking a small and painful step in its direction. "Don't share him with them, don't listen to their stories."

Astrid looked absolutely confused and caught off guard. "Hiccup, I can't. It's tradition." She was barely making an effort to stop him, though.

"Yeah, because we know how great I am with tradition. We were just married and I'm injured. I'm sure they'll understand." He pulled a little more on her shoulders and she took a hesitant step with him, looking back at the great hall. He waited for her to look back at him before he spoke, making sure that she heard everything he had to say next. "I don't know any of the stories. I know you don't want to share your dad, but I'd like to try anyway. If you don't mind, that is."

A small smile started to grow in size on her face after he spoke. She quietly nodded and helped him walk further towards the woods. "What are we waiting for, then?"

\* \* \*

><p>Stoick was sitting at the head of the table while everyone was talking and drinking mead all around. He would listen in when it fancied him, but he kept his eyes on the door, waiting on Hiccup and Astrid. Gobber was already laughing and singing with all the Vikings around him. Most of the Vikings had already drank too much to really be aware of what was happening, but Stoick kept from going that far. He wanted to share his stories with his son and his new daughter.<p>

When Hiccup and Astrid hadn't shown up halfway into the regaling of tales, he thought that they were tending to Hiccup's leg. He had argued with Hiccup back at the forge when they were gathering shields for the boat and that had endedâ€¦ badly. Hiccup threw his crutch away and said that he would help carry Angnir, no matter the cost. Stoick understood why. When Hiccup had told him and Gobber what had happened out there on the ocean, it had caused him to feel sad for his son. The worst part of it was that he just didn't know what to say!

Parenting wasn't something he was good at, he could admit. How Hiccup still turned out the way he did was thanks to all the gods in

Valhalla alone. Still, it was never made as apparent to him until he saw his son sitting there in the forge, suffering under all the guilt that he put on himself. He blamed himself for the death of Angnir and Stoick couldn't bring himself to say anything! It was Gobber that finally spoke and convinced the guilt ridden Hiccup that he didn't kill Angnir, the berserkers did. He explained to Hiccup that Angnir was one of the last true berserkers that lived on Berk. That his rage made it impossible for him to determine friend from foe and if Hiccup had not have acted, then there would have been two funerals today instead of one.

Gobber had always understood Hiccup and Stoick was both happy that Hiccup had someone to talk to and angry that it couldn't be him. So, when Hiccup came to the great hall tonight, he was going to make his son feel better. Gobber was right. The berserkers killed Angnir. They attacked Berk, on Hiccup's wedding day no less. They would pay. As his father before him taught him, you strike the iron while it is still hot. However, after waiting so long, he decided that he could wait no longer, so he stood and yelled at those in the great hall. "Everyone! Today, we celebrate the worth and mettle of Angnir! He was a great Viking that honors his house and hall! He was a true Viking of Berk! We can tell stories all night long of him, but is that all we are going to do?" The Vikings assembled seemed to lurch a little and some shook their heads from side to side. "We look after our own! They attacked our home! Destroyed our homes! Stopped my son's wedding! They killed one of our own! Are we going to just sit here and rebuild? Let them get away and have them laugh at how weak we are?"

The assembled Vikings yelled a very loud and collective "NO!"

Stoick raised his right hand and gripped it tight into a fist. "Then how about we go and show them what it means to attack our home! Let's show them what it's like to lose their houses! Let them cower in fear, knowing that we are Vikings! And we are ANGRY!" Stoick's speech roused a drunken roar from the great hall that shook the tables and mugs started to beat against the wood.

"Tomorrow, we sail after their broken ships! We will meet them at their home! We will show them what a Viking does to those that wrong him! I need volunteers! Who wants to come?" Hands flew in the air, all their shouts roaring in a unanimous roar of approval and willingness.

Yes, Stoick wasn't a good parent. But he was a great chief. Nobody hurt his family. He looked out for his own. Astrid would get her vengeance and Hiccup would be happy to pay the berserkers back for taking Angnir from him. It was their fault, after all.

Still, something nagged him. Hiccup and Astrid didn't show up for the funeral feast. He was worried and he went over to Gobber to see if he couldn't talk to him and get someone to find the two. He found his battle brother drinking another mug from a passed out Viking next to him. "Gobber, have you seen Hiccup or Astrid?"

Gobber looked around for a bit before turning to Stoick. "No, I haven't. Huh. Well, I guess I can understand why." He shrugged and continued to swig down more mead.

"What do you mean, Gobber? I thought they'd be late because of

Hiccup's leg, but they didn't even show up!" Gobber lowered the mug and wiped the foam off of his mustache before he looked at Stoick with a smile.

"Alright, Stoick. Let's think about this for a second. Hiccup and Astrid are both missing. He doesn't really want to move around much because his leg is hurting him. And they were just married today. So, let me ask you this one thing. What were you doing the night you and Valka were married?" He wiggled his eyebrows meaningfully.

"Well, me and Val were at the house consu-" He stopped. His speech just cut off all of a sudden before he turned back to a smiling Gobber. His face slowly split into a massive smile and he jumped up from the bench. "This is cause for a celebration! I need a drink! I'm going to be a grandfather!" He jumped over to the mead barrel and poured himself another mug, draining it almost immediately before refilling it. His entire body was thrumming with giddiness. He wouldn't remember much after this, but he would definitely remember what Gobber said. "AHAHAHAHAHA!" With one last joyful laugh, Stoick jumped up and started to drink with his fellow Vikings with renewed vigor.

\* \* \*

><p>It had been quite a while since Hiccup and Astrid had finally made it back to the cove where he shot down Toothless. It was quiet there and it felt more special to him now that he shared this important place with Astrid. She seemed radiant when she talked about the times she spent with Angnir. She laughed when she told him about their sparring matches and she was really excited when she told him how he had taught her to fish and hunt.<p>

He just sat next to her on a stone, listening attentively. It was rather easy to listen to, actually. Seeing her this happy had somehow let him ignore the pain that was annoying him. When she smiled, his heart clenched just a bit more than it should, his mind a jumble of warmth and joy.

Astrid didn't really talk about the battles that Angnir won or the amazing feats he was famous for. Instead, she told him of the times she spent with him and how he acted when they were alone at home together. It was a much more personal look at the man behind the large axe.

"You should have seen the look on his face! He was so surprised that I could throw my axe and cut down that tree!" She was smiling warmly at him, seemingly lost in the good memory.

"Did it look like this?" Hiccup made his jaw go slack and hang open, his eyes bugging out.

"Ahahahaha! Yeah! Almost like that!" Astrid laughed at him wholeheartedly. Yeah, he was being an idiot, but if it made her laugh like that, he'd do it in a heartbeat. The night had started to grow colder and he shivered a little bit, much to his chagrin.

Astrid seemed to have caught the small shudder and stood up, helping Hiccup to his feet along the way. "It's getting a bit cold. Let's go back." He slowly nodded. She started to help him shuffle his way up the walls of the cove, giving him a strong hand to help lift him up

along the way.

They were silent most of the way, but it felt good. Astrid was smiling most all of the way, no doubt remembering the good times with her father. Hiccup was just happy that she was happy. He certainly wouldn't tell her right now, but she looked even more attractive when she smiled than when she was angry.

He shivered again, trying to keep it from alerting Astrid, but that didn't seem to work. She tightened her hold around his waist and grabbed his other hand with hers, rubbing it a little to keep it warm.

When they reached the Hofferson Hall, Astrid opened the door and walked in with him. She set him down at the same kitchen chair and went into the living area to start a fire. Hiccup heard her striking flint and iron before a small glow started to fill the room. He looked over at Toothless and saw that he was chewing on Hiccup's crutch.

"Great. Well, guess I can go and get another stick." He admitted to himself that he liked the feel of having Astrid underneath one of his arms, but he knew that it would be more than a little selfish to wish for that all the time. Maybe if he made somethingâ€¦

His thoughts were interrupted by Astrid coming back and helping him stand again, moving them both to sit in front of the fireplace. When they had finally gotten comfortable, Astrid sat to his left, away from his injured leg. Still, it made him feel a little uncomfortable. His prosthetic leg wasn't exactlyâ€¦ pretty. He secretly tried to hide the mechanical part under his other leg, but the cold metal made him regret it.

Astrid was looking into the fire, but she turned to look back at him. Dang, he was staring again. Seriously, Hiccup berated himself for still doing that when she was literally right next to him. She cleared her throat a little.

"Hiccup. Iâ€¦" She paused and then leaned in and kissed his cheek. His entire face instantly started to heat up and his cheek felt like it was touching lightning. Too soon, it ended and all he heard was Astrid's small voice next to his left ear. "Thank you, for everything." Then, she got up and left. Hiccup watched her with a face similar to the one he had made earlier for her in the cove. She stopped just as she reached the bottom of the stairs and looked at him one last time. He could see her send him a quick, but sincere smile before she made her way up to her room and her door closed behind her.

He brought his hand up to his face and felt the warm spot that she had touched. Sure, they had kissed before, but this oneâ€¦ this one seemed different. She hadn't punched him or anything. That was new. But above that, it had a different feel about it altogether. Her face afterward didn't register embarrassment or relief. It was justâ€¦ happy. Hiccup grinned a huge toothy smile and looked back into the fire.

"How peculiar."

**\*\*Alright! I hope you enjoyed the chapter! You have all been**



extremely kind and truthful with me concerning the story, so please let me repay the favor. The reason you didn't see this story for so long was because I have been severely depressed.\*\*\*\* I was worried that my depression would leak into my story and you all did not deserve to see that mess here. My motivation for everything seemed to have drained out of me and I was just a walking shadow of myself. I was extremely worried that I wouldn't get a job and I had to rely on my younger brother to keep me afloat. It was a severely humbling experience and I often revisited this story to see your reviews. They really did help me get past the worst of it. Needless to say, I have got a job now and I am finally able to support myself. I know it seems sort of like a formality for authors here to thank those that reviewed their story, but it is different this time. It is thanks to you all that I was able to have that light that kept me from going deeper into sadness. So from the bottom of my heart, I thank each and every one of you. I hope that I can repay you for the kindness and enormous generosity you have all given to me. Thank you once again, everyone. A quick FYI, the story isn't over yet, either. Just letting you know that right now.\*\*

End  
file.